PLAY

AC/DC
HELLS BELLS

RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS
TIPPA MY TONGUE

THE WHITE STRIPES
HOTEL YORBA

TOTAL Guitar

PLAY BETTER NOW!

HOW TO PLAY BLUES

BEGINNER BLUES
MUDDY WATERS
HOOCHIE COOCHIE MAN

HENDRIX
HOW JIMI PLAYED THE BLUES

LARKIN POE
"RIFF CRAZY!"

ALTER BRIDGE
GET HEAVIER!

THE 1975
ONE SONG – NINE GUITARS!

REVIEWED
CHAPMAN ML2 PRO
The YouTube star's latest model on test

20 WAYS TO GET YOUR MOJO WORKIN'

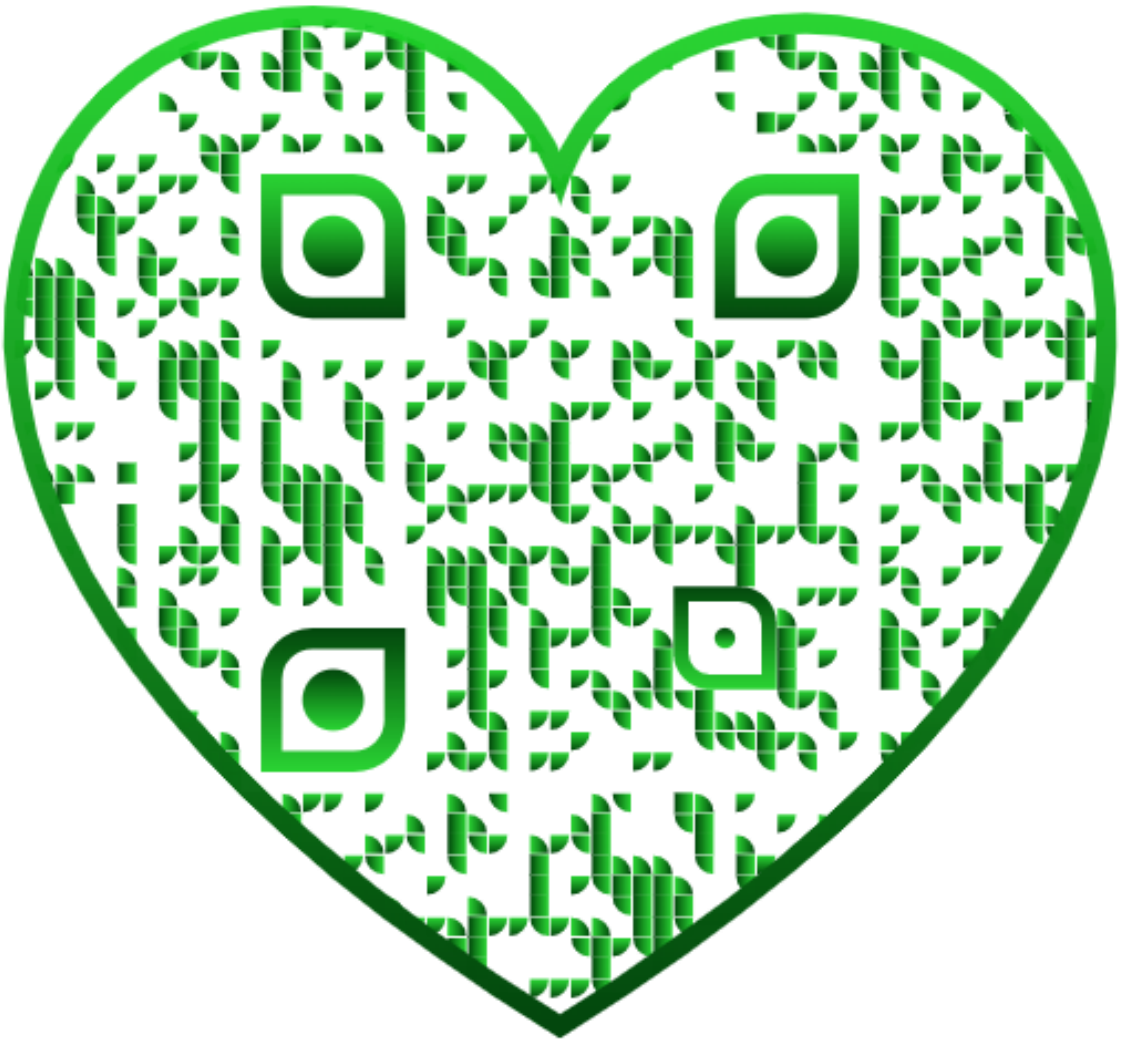
- PRO SOLOING SECRETS
- CHORDS YOU MUST KNOW
- YOUR BEST EVER TONE

FEATURING

THE GREATEST BLUES PLAYERS OF ALL TIME

BUDDY GUY / BB KING / SRV

ALBERT KING / RORY GALLAGHER & MORE



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Future Publishing
QUAY HOUSE, THE AMBURY, BATH, BA1 1UA
Tel: 01225 442244 **Fax:** 01225 822763
Email: totalguitar@futurenet.com
Website: www.totalguitar.co.uk

EDITORIAL
Editor: Chris Bird
Group Art Director: Graham Dalzell
Senior Music Editor: Jason Sidwell
Content Editor: Paul Elliott
Production Editor: Stan Bull
Music Co-ordinators: Zoe Maughan, Natalie Beilby

CONTRIBUTORS
Stuart Williams, Jenna Scaramanga, Amit Sharma, Ellie Rogers, Rob Laing, Charlie Griffiths, Jono Harrison, Grant Moon, Sam Roche, Jonathan Horsley, Simon Young, Richard Barrett, Jon Bishop, Tim Tucker, Neville Marten
Music Engraver: Simon Troup and Jennie Troup
Photography: Neil Godwin, Olly Curtis, Phil Barker, Kevin Nixon

ADVERTISING
Phone: 01225 442244 **Fax:** 01225 732285
Chief Revenue Officer: Zach Sullivan, zach.sullivan@futurenet.com
UK Commercial Sales Director: Clare Dove, clare.dove@futurenet.com
Advertising Sales Director: Lara Jaggon, lara.jaggon@futurenet.com
Account Sales Directors: Alison Watson, alison.watson@futurenet.com
Guy Meredith, guy.meredith@futurenet.com

MARKETING
Head Of Marketing: Sharon Todd
Subscriptions Marketing Managers: Faith Wardle, Rachel Wallace

PRODUCTION & DISTRIBUTION
Production Controller: Frances Twentyman
Head of Production UK & US: Mark Constance
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Head of Newstrade: Tim Mathers

CIRCULATION
Trade Marketing Manager: Michelle Brock 0207 429 3683

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MANAGEMENT
Brand Director, Music: Stuart Williams
Head Of Design (Music): Brad Merrett
Content Director: Scott Rowley
Group Art Director: Graham Dalzell

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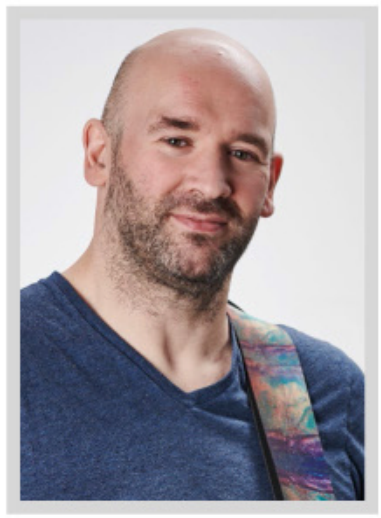

I think it's fair to say that every electric guitarist should know a little bit about the blues. Ever since Robert Johnson did his fabled deal with the devil at a crossroads in Mississippi, blues has informed and influenced more music than any other genre. From early rock 'n' roll to hard rock, heavy metal, hip-hop and more, countless styles feature the phrasing, forms and harmonies of blues to this day. What this means for us guitarists is that there's always plenty to learn from this enduring style – and we can apply those lessons to lots of other music that we love.

With that in mind, this month we've put together what I believe is TG's biggest ever blues feature. We kick off with seven pages of playing tips, tab riffs and jam tracks – 20 lessons in all – that'll help you improve your basic skills or develop further if you're a more experienced player. We look at the best gear available for blues today, and we profile the greatest blues guitarists of all time. We also dive deep into the styles of Buddy Guy and Jimi Hendrix, with a look at their most influential blues songs, the gear they used, plus tab lessons on how they play.

Finally, wrapping up this massive extravaganza of blues, we have two fantastic interview pieces for you. Matthew Stubbs, guitarist with Boston-based retro-chic blues revivalists GA-20, tells us about his love of early Chicago blues and runs us through his vintage gear collection. And Larkin Poe's Rebecca and Megan Lovell give us a golden rule for their brand of rootsy blues-rock. Find out what it is on p66.

Enjoy the magazine and I'll see you next month!

Chris Bird Editor

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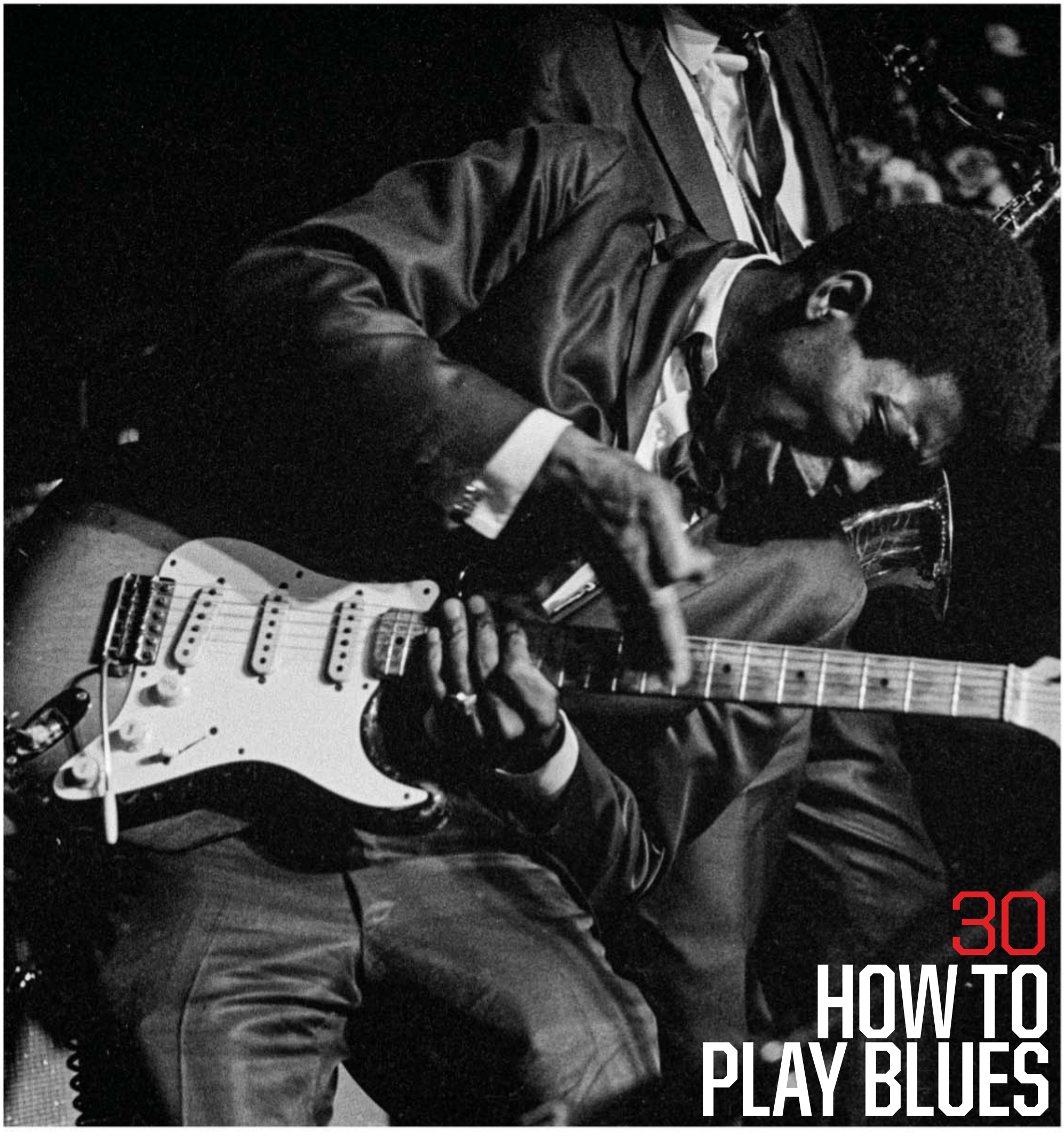

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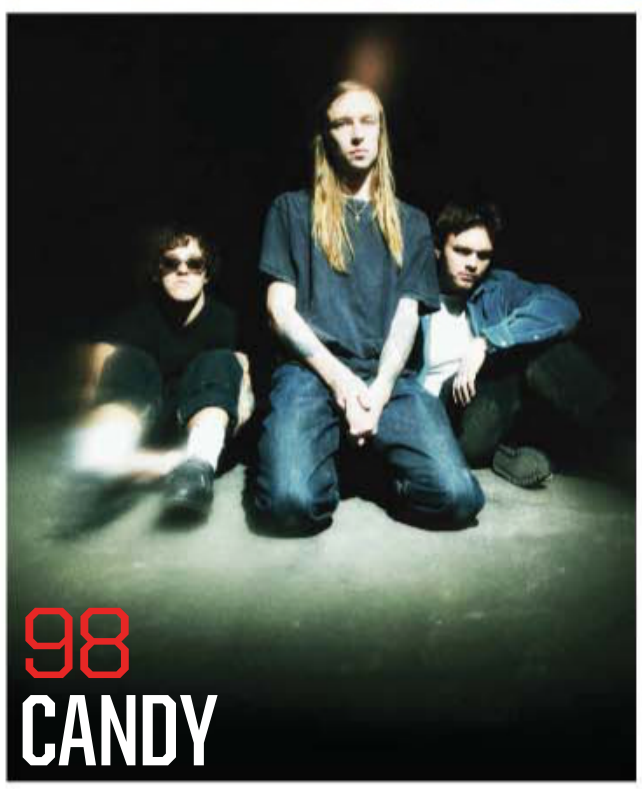
HOW TO PLAY BLUES

Cover image David Redfern/Getty Images; This page: Getty Images



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YOUR NEWS IN GUITARS

Photo Thomas Rabsch

ALBUM

"WHEN YOU DETUNE IT FEELS MORE SUBVERSIVE!"

HOW ALTERNATIVE ROCK STARS **BUSH** GOT HEAVIER THAN EVER BEFORE

Having fronted Bush since 1992, Gavin Rossdale knows a thing or two about fuzzed-up rock tones. But as he explains, he and co-guitarist Chris Traynor are drawing from metal influences like never before on the band's new album *The Art Of Survival*...

When did you realise this was going to be a very different-sounding Bush album?

I was going through a bunch of tunings. Open tunings, drop tunings, all sorts of different ways to experiment. I even tried Robert Fripp's [NST] tuning at one point. I was asking myself what can I do to make these tracks stand out... because once I sing on them, I tend to bring it back into the focus of Bush. This time I wanted to go far out. So I settled on drop C, though there are a couple in drop B, after messing around and seeing what I liked. I'm still a bit of a neanderthal with the guitar. It's all a voyage of discovery through the alchemy of making melodies go with music. It's an endless mystery to me, but also a source of good fun when you crack the code, you know?

There's a certain magic some riffs have in those lower registers...

When I play in standard, I feel like I'm wearing my Sunday best! There's no element of filth to it. When you detune it feels more subversive, like you're going into a netherworld. If rock music is going to come back as the counterculture it should be, let's keep it dark and weird. Even the ballads were written in a dropped tuning because, like you say, it creates a certain vibe.

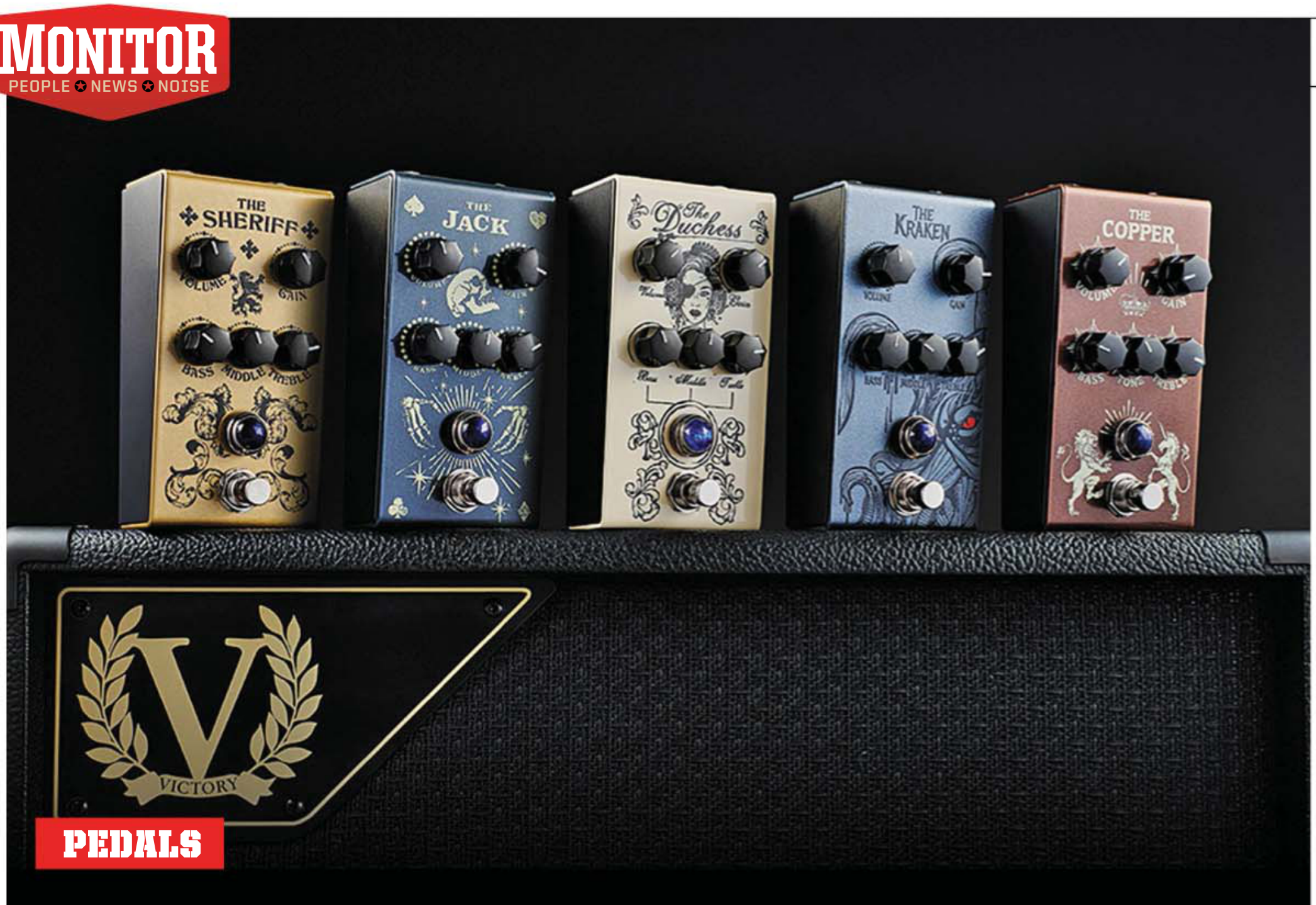
You are the owner of a purple Jazzmaster famously used by Joe Walsh for the verse rhythms on *Hotel California*. Did that end up on this record?

It's funny, when I was in the studio and putting all my guitars through the wringer, the Jazzmaster didn't like being tuned down to drop C. The neck got a bit upset. My tech told me not to f*ck with that guitar too much, so we kept it in standard and I just play when I need it. I ended up using my ESPs a lot, as well as my Jim Root Jazzmaster which totally wants to be detuned and can't possibly be used in standard! Tosin Abasi sent me some guitars, they've been a lot of fun to play with. That's about it. I don't have a massive guitar collection, I like having less and playing them more.

The tones are undoubtedly the heaviest you've ever recorded. What kind of amps did you have?

It's purely Neural DSP. A friend of mine, Nick DePirro, plays in a band called Night Verses. He's an amazing seven-string guitarist, very weird and always brilliant. So I started asking him how he got some of his tones, trying to find out about the gear. He told me about Neural a while ago. I was already using Axe-Fx stuff live but never in the studio, they mainly came in handy for tours because at one point I had too much – the Ground Control board, the Diezel amps, Marshall speakers and whatever else. When I tried out the Neural tones in my studio, they sounded incredible. We just didn't need anything else!

Amit Sharma



PEDALS

VICTORY V1 SERIES

VICTORY AND THORPYFX TEAM-UP FOR A QUINTET OF OVERDRIVE VOICES

Since launching in 2013, Victory has gone from being a brand new company to one of the UK's most exciting and popular amp brands. With artists such as Guthrie Govan, Rabea Massaad and Ritchie Kotzen all on board with signature products, and dozens more in its artist line-up, its range of amps and floor-based preamps includes something for every tonal outcome thanks to revered Head Designer Martin Kidd. Victory isn't alone in its success story, though, as Adrian Thorpe MBE – a former Major in the British Army – founded ThorpyFX in 2014. Since then, his pedal designs, often themed around military names such as The Bunker, The Fallout Cloud and The Peacekeeper, have been met with widespread acclaim.

It makes sense, then, that for Victory's latest line-up, the two UK brands have collaborated to come up with a line of pedals based on previous Victory valve amp designs, but with Thorpy's input helping to bring them to a smaller, amp-in-a-box drive pedal format.

The result is the five-strong V1 series, which includes stompbox versions of Victory's The Sheriff, The Jack, The Duchess, The Kraken and The Copper. The Duchess is based on Victory's V40 Duchess, which focuses on American cleans, boost and gain. The Copper goes after '60s/'70s British EL84 rock tones, with blues-rock/classic rock sounds achievable across the travel of its gain control.

The Jack takes the Guthrie Govan-co-designed amp circuit and distills it into a pedal, offering up "low gain, barky sounds" all the way up to "over the top gain." The Sheriff gives us vintage rock, with enough gain on tap to nail some '80s hard rock tones, and The Kraken delivers modern high-gain with British flavours of the Victory VX at lower settings, and American-style heavy tones when pushed.

"The idea of a collaboration was something that made a good deal of sense, as we [Victory] were to an extent, venturing into the unknown…" Says Victory's Martin Kidd. "At Victory, we have the knowhow, of course; however, being able to make use of Adrian's experience and the various subtleties of his design ethic, enabled us to better appeal to the player who likes a clean amp platform; getting their various sounds from pedals."

ThorpyFX's Adrian Thorpe adds, "We were keen to make the V1 pedals sound as close to the full-bore valve amps as possible but working with Martin and the team meant that we had to be even more precise to do their amp designs justice in solid state pedal form. It took a long time and many times we had to go back to the drawing board. Despite this, maintaining an uncompromising nature of what the Victory sound is, means that pedal fiends worldwide can enjoy these pedals, no matter what their flavour preferences. I'm proud to say we worked on these V1 pedals."

Each pedal is hand-built in the UK, featuring a heavy duty steel chassis. They all include a three-band EQ (apart from The Copper) with volume and gain controls, are powered by a 9V PSU. The Victory V1 series is available now, priced at £199 each.

Stuart Williams

PEDALS

PRS PEDALS

Victory and Orange (see p10) aren't the only brands with their eyes down this month, as PRS has now put both feet in the pedal market with three pedals: the Horsemeat Transparent Overdrive (£279), Mary Cries Optical Compressor (£229) and Wind Through The Trees Dual Analog Flanger (£379). Apparently born out of Paul Reed Smith's hunt for tones in his home studio, his solution to creating new sounds was to build and mod his own designs. "We believe the pedals we've created are highly usable, great-sounding pieces of professional gear," says Smith. "A real magic pedal makes the 'board. We're trying to make pedals that make the 'board and stay on it." All are available now.

AMPLIFIER

LANEY LA-STUDIO

Laney has added to its SuperGroup valve amp line-up with the LA-Studio: a low-wattage valve amp that incorporates Two Notes' Torpedo DynIR impulse responses. At its core, the LA-Studio is a 12BH7-powered valve head, featuring three ECC83 preamp valves, three-band EQ plus a presence control, and it can be switched between 3 watts and less than one watt at the output stage for cranked amp tones in environments where noise is an issue. It features four input channels – bass 1/2 or Treble 1/2 – each with their own gain response, and round the back there's a Two Notes Torpedo module for delivering a high quality direct output. It comes pre-loaded with 10 impulse responses: two from Laney and eight from Two-Notes, and costs £849.

GUITAR

FENDER AERODYNE SPECIAL SERIES

Cast your mind back to the mid-00s and you might remember Fender's Aerodyne leftfield takes on some of its classic guitar designs. Now, Fender has revisited the Aerodyne series with the Aerodyne Special. The Japanese-made collection is a contemporary take on the Strat and Tele, with bound, scratchplate-less bodies, Babicz bridges, 12-inch fingerboard radiuses and matching headstocks. There are SSS and HSS Strat options, while the Aerodyne Special Telecaster comes with body-mounted controls. Both shapes are offered in a number of finishes with a choice of maple or rosewood 'boards. Prices start at £1299.

Words Stuart Williams **Photography** Phil Barker

FRESHLY SQUEEZED

Orange revamps a trio of pedals from the 70s

You may or may not be aware that in the 1970s, Orange made more than a slight dent in the pedal world. Now, the UK icon has reissued three pedals from the era, in the shape of its Phaser, Distortion and Sustain pedals.

The reissues came about after fans on the Orange 'message board' went mad for a photo of one of the original Sustain pedals from 50 years ago. From here, Orange dug out the original schematics and set about recreating the pedals with a view to bringing them up to date for 2022.

The Distortion in particular has a redesign to its circuit with Orange saying that it has a vintage appearance, met by "all-new circuit design below deck" replacing the original's diode design with a new amp circuit. There's Level and Depth controls on the top, with an internal trim pot giving you control over semi-permanent treble levels.

The Phaser features a single Speed control, allowing you to adjust the rate of the four-stage phaser, and it's also had its circuitry tweaked to lower the noise floor and incorporate the LED and 9V input.

Finally, the Sustain pedal is essentially a compressor – smoothing out dynamics, adding chime and boosting volume – but with what Orange describes as a "three-dimensional take on the compressor/sustainer effect". The Orange Phaser, Sustain and Distortion are available now priced at £199 each.

UP CLOSE

Modern vintage

The pedals take their inspiration from 70s circuits, but have been tweaked and improved to give better performance for 2022.

Small format

If pedalboard space is a problem, these should nestle in with the rest of your pedals without fuss at 9x10x8.4cm.

Simple controls

With just one control on the Phaser, and two for the Sustain and Distortion (plus an internal trim for treble control), they don't come much easier to operate than this.

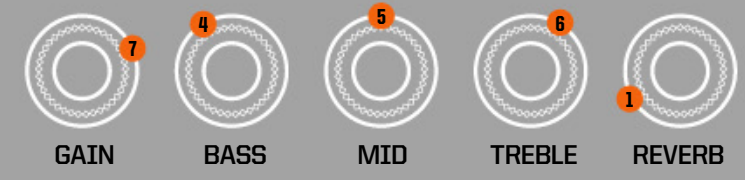
HOW TO

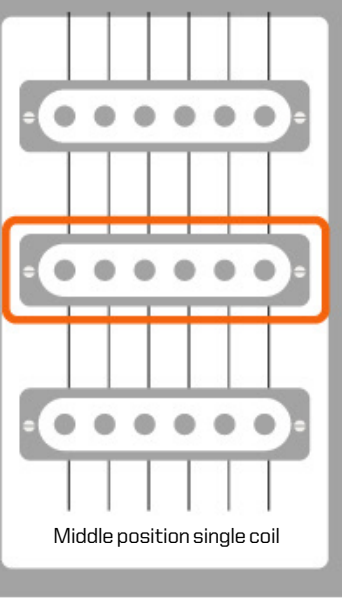
WHAT YOU WILL LEARN
- ✔Syncopated strumming
- ✔Powerchords
- ✔Single-note riffing

RIFF OF THE MONTH

GET THE TONE

CHANNEL CLEAN





Middle position single coil

Frusciante plays this riff on a Strat with a crunchy clean tone providing some grit. The Frusciante sound is in between rock and funk, with the gain set so that powerchords and single notes sustain and react to heavier pick strokes, but still sounds sweet and clear on the gently strummed G9 chord at the end.

RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS

Tippa My Tongue

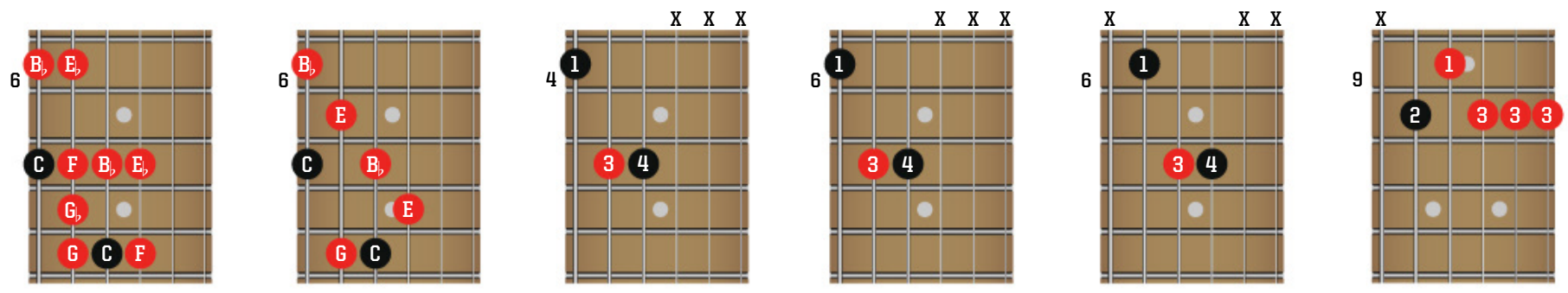
This month's riff comes from the lead single on the Red Hot Chili Peppers' unexpected second album of the year, *Return Of The Dream Canteen*. The song features John Frusciante playing this typically funky riff which combines syncopated powerchords with single notes.

The riff starts with A♭5 and B♭5 powerchords played with palm-muted alternate strumming. The rhythm here is syncopated and the accents fall on both down and upstrokes, but keep your hand moving down and up throughout to maintain the groove.

The single-note line snakes around a few fret positions, but, in general, you can frame it around your first, second and third fingers, which you can move as a block from position to position. No big stretches here! Just be ready to switch from single-note playing to the 10th position G9 chord at the end of the riff. Make sure to follow our slowed down play-through of the riff, which should make it all clearer.

CHEAT SHEET...

Appears at: 0:48–1:10
Tempo: 88bpm
Key/scale: C blues scale / C7 arpeggio
Main techniques: Alternate strumming and picking, hammer-ons and pull-offs



This single-note lines are a mixture of major and minor sounds built around a C root note. They include a combination of C blues scale (C E♭ F G♭ G B♭) and a C7 arpeggio (C E G B♭). The riff is also made up of three powerchords (A♭5, B♭5 and E♭5), plus a final G9 chord played at the 9th and 10th frets.

Photo Getty

Fender

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FIRST STEPS IN GUITAR...

BLUES LEAD

Perfectly timed with our blues issue, Paul takes his first steps in blues soloing

As Hendrix taught us, there's a blurry line between rhythm and lead guitar. After tackling the chords for a 12-bar blues, this month Paul takes on a single-note riff. Jenna's example could work as a rhythm part, especially if someone else is playing chords, or as the basis for a lead solo. Early blues masters who played unaccompanied like John Lee Hooker or Robert Johnson would often employ repetitive, rhythmic licks to keep the groove going. You can also improvise over the backing track using the E minor pentatonic scale. Don't be afraid to experiment – a dodgy note never hurt anyone!

TEACHER

JENNA SCARAMANGA
Jenna has taught guitar for 15 years at music colleges, schools, and IGF summer camps. She studied with Guthrie Govan at BIMM, and was classic rock columnist for TG's sister magazine *Guitar Techniques*.

STUDENT

PAUL ELLIOTT
Paul has written about music since 1985 for various titles including *Sounds*, *Kerrang!*, *Q*, *MOJO* and *Classic Rock*. Among the many guitarists he has interviewed are Slash, Angus Young, Keith Richards and Jimmy Page.

JENNA SAYS...

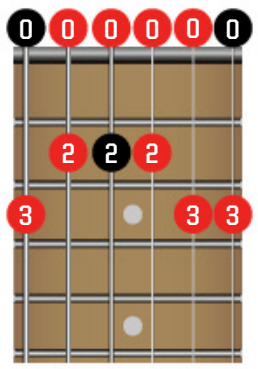
Paul was a bit daunted to try blues lead guitar, but he relaxed when I showed him the part. Albert and BB King regularly built solos around one simple lick – you don't need Joe Bonamassa's technique. There's really one hammer-on lick this month, but it gets transposed to fit over each chord of the blues. Although it's a straightforward lick, it points to how the real masters 'play the changes' of a 12-bar, choosing their notes to complement each chord rather than just noodling around a scale. If you learn this month's lead part you'll always know where you are in the 12-bar sequence, which is a key to great soloing. When you're hammering onto a note, remember to think "hard and from a height" to get the note to sound strongly. Once you can hammer on and pull off, you're halfway to playing Van Halen's *Eruption* – 50 years of guitar in one lick!

Words Jenna Scaramanga, Paul Elliott **Guitars and backing** Jenna Scaramanga **Image** Paul Natkin/Getty Images

TECHNIQUE CHECK...

Get your fingers in the right place and those blues leads will sing!

1 E MINOR PENTATONIC SCALE



Use this scale to improvise your own solo. You could start with the TG riff and add notes from this scale in between.

2 HAMMER-ON TECHNIQUE

Raise your finger high and bring it down rapidly and firmly to make a loud, confident hammer-on.

3 FINGER STRETCH

Over the B7 chord, keep your thumb low to allow this stretch.

12-BAR BLUES

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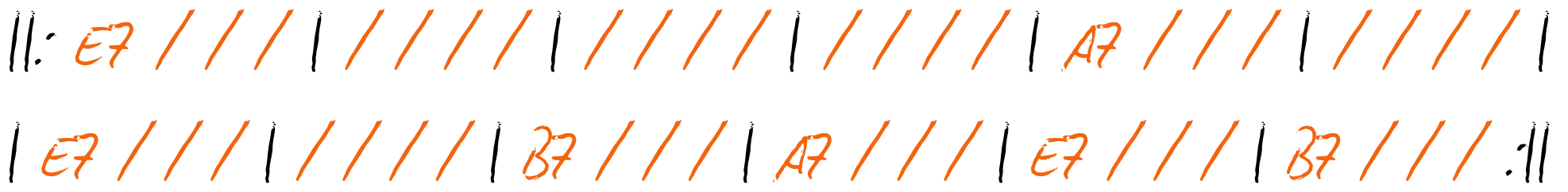
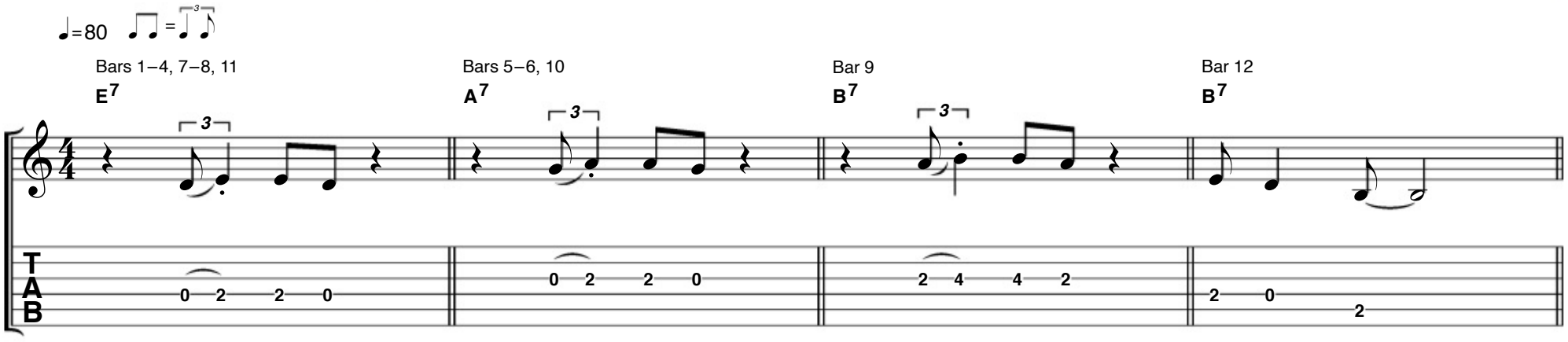


This month we're in the key of E. The E minor pentatonic scale includes every open string, so it's an easy place to start soloing.

SIMPLE BLUES RHYTHM

BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO



This simple blues idea is really just one riff shifted for each chord – plus an easy variation in the final bar to bring proceedings to a musical conclusion. The lick for the B7 chord doesn't have the benefit of open strings, so fret with your first finger and hammer on with your third.

PAUL SAYS...

It certainly was a daunting prospect for me to try playing blues lead. When Jenna suggested it, my first thought was that I'd be trying to run before I could walk. As it turned out, this was much simpler than I first feared, and more importantly, it was great fun – especially when I got to the hammer-ons and pull-offs. As a Van Halen fan, I've always wondered what the hell Eddie was doing with these techniques. Now, I understand the basics. Really, any guitar lesson that ends with channelling a bit of EVH can only be a good thing. This also served as a reminder of how fluid music really is – how you can get from blues to EVH in a few moves. But then, Eddie always said that Clapton was his biggest influence – the Beano Album as well as Cream – so it all makes sense.

Earlier this year, Canadian post-hardcore heroes Alexisonfire dropped *Otherness* – their first full-length record in 13 years. Mixing classic ferocity with newfound melodicism – plus plenty of wisdom gleaned from the myriad musical projects its constituent members have worked on in the interim – the album, says guitarist/vocalist Wade MacNeil, was all about "getting rid of the rules we'd created".

The band had a single serious chat before recording ensued in earnest. As Wade recalls: "The one conversation we had was that we're lucky to still have this in our lives, that we shouldn't take it for granted and that we deserve to do it in a way that makes us all happy."

As they head out this month on a UK tour, Wade is pleased to report that "everything about Alexisonfire feels very good these days," and confirms with a definitive "yeah!" that the band is back for good...

After the long pause between albums, how has it felt to have made such a triumphant return?

It's been different from any other music I've ever released. The response has been so overwhelmingly positive. Honestly, it's a bit shocking. When you make creative decisions, you do so knowing they will be divisive and rub certain people the wrong way. This is different. Honestly, it's a bit strange!

When this band was on hiatus you replaced Frank Turner as singer in Gallows. Has this, and other projects you've been a part of, influenced the way you now approach making music with Alexisonfire?

I think the reservoir of where I can draw from is much larger. Every time I go into a studio – especially working with other people – I learn a lot. *Otherness* is just that. I don't think it's a record we could have made ten years ago because we weren't the musicians we are today.

What was the recording process like?

We demoed the songs and really worked on them altogether in terms of finessing the vocals. The album was very 'done' before we went in to record it. We pretty much recorded it twice, which was not really a way we've operated in the past. The band has, first of all, three voices, and that's led to people taking care of their own spot. We really wanted to try and stop that concept of whose voice is whose, and for us to all sing in tandem.

Words Ellie Rogers Photos Vanessa Heins

"FOR ONE SOLO I WAS USING EIGHT FUZZ PEDALS!

The reunited **Alexisonfire** are reinventing post-hardcore – with "ancient" effects and blues-inspired solos...

Did that approach also extend to having less defined rhythm and lead guitar roles than previously?
Dallas [Green, guitar/keyboards] really wanted to focus on singing, and he likes playing rhythm guitar. So, early on, we made the decision that I was going to play all the leads, which is very different from what we've done in the past. I think it's just something that suits both of us better. The guitar playing I've been doing, my interest in guitars, and what I've been listening to has definitely been a lot more 70s stuff with lots of lead playing.

Which artists inspired you in particular?
I've always been drawn towards blues-based guys – guys who are trying to rip off Hendrix, or the old school dudes like Albert King. I think all the melodic leads come out of that.

There's quite a Hendrixian, wah-soaked solo on *Reverse The Curse*. Could you talk us through some of your favourite lead performances on the record?
That was a fun one. I was listening to (cult stoner rock band) Fu Manchu all the way while driving to rehearsal. Then I got into Toronto and I went and bought a wah pedal and wrote that song. I also really like the really clean, melodic playing in the bridge of *Dark Night Of The Soul*. I feel like that's very Allman Brothers or Grateful Dead-inspired stuff. One of the things that definitely felt like the way to end the record was *World Stops Turning* with the never-ending guitar solo that happens at the end of it. I went for a full, 'standing on the edge of a cliff' type of solo.

What guitars did you take into the studio?
There's my '52 Les Paul Junior, which has been my main guitar for a long time. There was a '59 Double Cutaway that I borrowed from this old guy who lives in Port Dover, Ontario. I've been trying to buy it from him for years. It's the best sounding guitar in Canada. Other than that, I've got one of those metal-necked Kramer guitars, which I did a lot of the heavier rhythm tracks with. Then, a 2019 Custom Shop Strat that I played a lot.

An array of tonally very different beasts...
Certainly. I definitely tried to use them in different ways. I brought a full first generation Sunn Model T stack, but I played the Strat through that. Then, for the stuff that's supposed to be heavier, where I used the Gibsons with the P-90s, I ran a 1950 Fender Princeton, cranked. It takes a long time to realise that you can make stuff sound the heaviest with the smallest amp, but when you do, it's a real game changer. They take pedals in a really crazy way, too.

Beyond the wah, what were you playing with in the pedal department?
I've got one million pedals. I brought absolutely all of them. I've got an OG [ProCo] RAT that I used on a lot of stuff. I've got a really old fuzz

called a Companion, and it's the fuzz that was on those early Jesus And Mary Chain records. That's on a lot of stuff. I've got a bunch of those massive old Maestro pedals – like the Phase and the Rhythm 'N Sound. I used the fuzz from the Rhythm 'N Sound a decent amount, as well as the bass setting on that. I've got another Maestro Phase and that's on some of the dreamier stuff, too. It was mostly just ancient finicky pedals that you kind of need to kick.

The kind you have to kick and then never touch again...
Yeah, don't even look at them! One of the things that I really, really love is – for the guitar solo on *World Stops Turning* – I was using all of the fuzz pedals. I'm not sure if you'd notice it without it being pointed out, but, when it's all starting to fade out, you can hear me clicking off each one of the pedals. There were eight or something, and that's the end of the record.

You mentioned that the songwriting was more or less worked out ahead of recording, but had you also decided upon tones you wanted to capture from prep you'd done in the rehearsal room?
The rehearsal room sounded like sh*t! I don't think I've ever been in a good one or written songs in a suitable environment. We wrote [2009 album] *Old Crows/Young Cardinals* above an insulation factory. The guys that worked there would burn insulation when it got cold, and the room would fill with smoke. This time, we were at our record label, but we were still in a brick box, wearing construction headphones and unable to hear the PA. So, we definitely didn't have any tones dialled in. But Dallas and I are both on the never-ending search for tone. As you mentioned, all the guitars I brought are very different tools tonally. For all the parts we did individually, I'd have a different idea of how we could get to that tone, and what pedals and amps would help facilitate that. The Princeton made a large showing, but I also had a 60s Vox, my Morris Custom head, an old Plexi, my Hiwatt, and a few combos.

FIRE BRIGADE
From left: Dallas Green (guitar/vocals/keys), Jordan Hastings (drums), Chris Steele (bass), George Pettit (vocals), Wade MacNeil (guitar/vocals)

Do you travel lighter for touring and would you ever be tempted by a profiling amp for recreating studio-born sounds on stage?
When I play live, I have two 70s Marshall 8x10s, and then I usually use my 80s Hiwatt and my Sunn Model T. Live, it's less about nuance and more about being devastatingly loud. I think anyone using one of those profiling amps is out of their goddamn mind! Do whatever you want to do and be whatever guitar player you want to be, but that's as far as is conceivably possible away from the type of guitar player I want to be. For the last ten years, I had this idea of turning on all my delay pedals and then taping my guitar to my amp, so it was just endlessly making noise. I've been doing it at the end of our shows for a long time now, and you f*cking can't do that with a Kemper!

"ANYONE USING ONE OF THOSE PROFILING AMPS IS OUT OF THEIR GODDAMN MIND!"

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Words Ellie Rogers

"THE GUITARS ARE BREATHING"

A deep dive into the heavy new **Alter Bridge** album – with **Mark Tremonti** and **Myles Kennedy**, two guitarists in perfect balance.

Mark Tremonti and Myles Kennedy have been honing their guitar double act in Alter Bridge for the best part of two decades. As they sit together in the bar of London's Royal Garden Hotel, they laugh when Myles says, "We've been playing together for so long, we've now morphed into one being!"

Tremonti has long been celebrated as one of the finest and most articulate guitarists of his generation, and while Kennedy is most famous for his four-octave vocal range – displayed both in Alter Bridge and in Slash's solo band – he's also a skilful guitarist in his own right.

Their guitars are front and centre on the new Alter Bridge album *Pawns & Kings*. Produced once again by the band's longtime collaborator Michael 'Elvis' Baskette, the album is focused on what Myles calls "meat and potatoes" guitar riffs, with a bare minimum of extraneous textures and instrumentation. As Mark explains: "A lot of times in the past, we used to have a string or a keyboard underneath to boost the music up, but on this record, we got rid of all that stuff. It sounds like the guitars are breathing. They're open and they have all this space to live."

For this reason, he adds, "People keep saying that this is our heaviest record yet." But beyond the abundance of abrasive, interlocking dual-guitar riffage, there is much more to *Pawns & Kings*. "I think this is maybe our most involved record," Mark says. "Out of all of the records, if somebody listened to it cold, it'd be the hardest to grasp right out of the gate because there are so many twists and turns. As an artist, you're trying to not let the listener go: 'This is Alter Bridge. It's going to do this, and then it's going to do that.' We want to keep people guessing."

And what also resonates powerfully in this new album is the shared conviction between Tremonti and Kennedy for conveying meaning in their songs. On *Pawns & Kings* they deftly balance a hard-hitting instrumental attack against deep lyricism, anthemic choruses against introspective verses, and moments of self-restraint against explosive displays of fretboard fireworks. "One of the hardest dances to do is to make something heavy and technical and still emotional at the same time," Mark says. "But unless the song means something to you, there's no point."

One of the more surprising elements of the new Alter Bridge album is how Tremonti and Kennedy have shaken up their 'traditional' roles. While it might once have been safe to assume that lead guitar duties would fall naturally to Tremonti, the precise call-and-response soloing on the album's title track and the eight and a half minute epic *Fable Of The Silent Sun* makes it hard to decipher exactly who's playing what. And although Myles describes himself, with tongue in cheek, as "the sensitive ponytail guy" of the band, he is the author of many of this record's heaviest riffs – including the moshpit-starting groove of *Silver Tongue* and the foreboding clangour of album opener *This Is War*.

Myles acknowledges that it's Mark's exemplary right hand chops that truly animate these riffs. "It's kind of like James Hetfield," he explains. "Some guys have it. It's an aggression. When I'd go in to track my part it was like, 'I can't wait to hear Mark play over the top and add his attack because it'll help bring it to life.'" Myles also reveals that when the pair descend into drop tunings, he opts for thick strings so that the "intonation is tighter," while Mark is more likely to use a lighter gauge and allow the strings "flop around" – thus differentiating their tones. Reaching for a colourful analogy, he explains: "It's like when you get hit in the gut. If you're a bigger person, it bounces around. That's part of what makes that sound."

"BEING A WRITER EXCITES ME WAY MORE THAN BEING A LEAD GUITAR PLAYER"

MARK TREMONTI

For tone and technique, Mark asserts that it's well worth reassessing the itty bitty pieces of triangular plastic that guitarists often take for granted. Picks, he says, are "the thing that you're interacting most with on your guitar. It's how you touch the guitar so it's important." Having recently embarked on a quest to "try every pick ever made" and see if a change could help him play better and dig in more, he found new favourites in Dunlop's 1mm and 1.35mm Flow picks. "It made a huge difference," he enthuses. "Now I can't look back."

For all his dedication to his craft, his precise and methodical approach to the guitar, Mark doesn't feel the need to flaunt his status as a guitar hero. The album's introspective ballad *Stay* – on which he sings lead – is one of a handful of tracks that doesn't contain a solo. "After being known as a guitar player for so many years, I always feel pressure, like I have to live up to something," he explains. "Being a writer excites me way more than being a lead guitar player." He has come a long way as an artist since his formative years as a speed metal buff. "If I just spent my time sitting down, one hundred per cent trying to be an excellent guitar player, you might hear a very different, more technically proficient guitar player, but I'd much rather create songs."

Conversely, Myles has keenly embraced the opportunity to shred more on *Pawns & Kings*, and even got himself a bespoke new tool for the job. During his solo summer tour, he was spotted rocking a sleek black PRS-built take on a Fender classic, and while an initial probe for details elicits a tongue-in-cheek, "I don't know what you're talking about!" he gleefully divulges that this is indeed a new prototype made to his exacting specifications.

The semi-secret project came about after the 2021 release of his second solo record, *The Ides Of March*, which he cut using a selection of vintage Telecasters. Not wanting to subject the valuable instruments to touring, and as a longtime player of PRS guitars, he called upon "Paul and the gang" to help him develop an alternative. "We riffed for a long time and they found this sound that was in my head," he says. "I have a real fondness for those early Telecasters, so you always wonder if there's a way you can combine elements with a more contemporary approach in something that would be very versatile. It's like a P-90 meets an old Blackguard-era Telecaster sound."

Myles used the guitar for all of his solos and the majority of his rhythm tracks on the record. "It cuts – it's all there," he enthuses. "It's got its own place, especially with Mark who's using humbuckers. It helped distinguish the sound." Myles stops short of calling it a signature model, and in regards to a consumer roll-out he teases: "We'll just have to see how it plays out." But things feel positive, with his bandmate already staking out a spot at the front of the queue: "It's not just for him," Mark laughs. "I'm getting one given to me!"

Of course, the star of Mark's collection is his own PRS Tremonti signature model. In fact, the only time you'll hear him without one is if a particular riff calls for a baritone chug. With its high output humbuckers and single cut body shape, we're best off, he suggests, thinking of it as "a modernised version of a Les Paul." He adds: "I hate to say it's more refined because there are so many great Les Pauls. But a perfect analogy for it is if you took an old hot rod from back in the sixties and put a brand new drivetrain inside it."

When it comes to amplifiers, Mark is a genuine aficionado, so there was no chance of travelling light when it came time to hit the studio for *Pawns & Kings*. "I got my car and put ten amps in there – all my favourites," he explains. "That's always one of the most fun days; we do an amp shoot-out and check them all out." Those that came out on top this time included his all-new 100-watt signature PRS MT100 (which, he says, will "probably" be released for public consumption in 2023) as well as its baby brother, the nifty PRS MT15 lunchbox valve amp. A Cornford RK100 also made the cut, alongside a Granophyre from modern metal specialists, Omega Ampworks. Last but by no means least, Mark brought two Dumbles to the high-class amp party, and Myles took a particular shine to one and used it for his solos.

"It's crazy," Myles says. "I used an amp that was probably more expensive than my first house." Indeed, because of their hefty price tags (often fetching upwards of £75,000), these rare and revered creations tend to dwell far out of reach of most players, so we asked the amp expert in chief to distil their magic.

After a considered pause, Mark says: "There's something that happens when your pick hits the string. It's this weird sensation that doesn't happen on other amps for me. It just has this thing. A lot of Dumble clones don't have it. There are also Dumbles that don't have it. There's bad sounding Dumbles and I've owned one, but when it's right, it is the best amp in the world."

For his rhythm parts, Myles used a Diezel Herbert and a VH4 – a tried and tested combination. Initially, however, it took years of searching for him to find amps that would sit comfortably among the expansive frequencies already occupied by Mark's well-established sound. "He uses a lot of real estate sonically and that's one of the things I loved about his tone when I first heard it," Myles explains. "The real challenge was finding where I fit in, and it was tough. We didn't figure it out until we were doing the *Blackbird* record [in 2007]. We were trying everything. I brought my JCM800s – we had tons – but we kept shooting out. It wasn't sitting in the right spot or it sounded too similar to what Mark was doing."

2 BECOME 1
Mark Tremonti (left) and Myles Kennedy have a near-telepathic understanding. The result, Mark says, is "our heaviest record yet."

After almost running out of options, Myles recalls how the lightbulb moment came when he stumbled across a Diezel Herbert stashed away in a closet: "We gave it a try, plugged it in and fired up channel two and there it was – all the frequencies that complemented what Mark was doing. I haven't looked back since."

Similarly, Myles has also been getting maximum mileage out of a favourite stomp box – a "big blue" Line 6 MM4 Modulation Modeller, used for many of the cleaner, more ambient textures on the new record. He laughs, "I don't even know if they still make them, but there's this one sound I programmed back around 2000, and I've done my best to make sure I don't ever lose it."

Armed with their respective weapons of choice, Alter Bridge will be touring arenas this winter – a thought that was never far from mind when *Pawns...* was being written. "When we write a record, we know we're going to play it live," Mark says. "We like the ballads but we also like to rock. Heavy equals energy – and energy equals a great show!"

Words Stan Bull **Portraits** Samuel Bradley

"IN ONE SONG THERE'S NINE GUITAR PARTS GOING ON SIMULTANEOUSLY"

How the two-guitar dynamic works in **The 1975** – by the band's lead player and secret metalhead **Adam Hann**

It's a grey Monday morning, and Adam Hann, lead guitarist of indie-pop behemoths The 1975, is reflecting on the burnout caused from recording the band's fourth album, 2020's *Notes On A Conditional Form*. "We decided to do our third and fourth albums back to back," he says. "When you're on tour, you're finishing at 1.00am or whatever, and then it was like, 'Time to get working on this album!' It just proved very challenging," he sighs. "There's a reason people make albums in the traditional way, and that's because it works..."

The Covid-19 pandemic forced the group to release *Notes On A Conditional Form* to a locked-down audience worldwide, though it nevertheless went straight to number 1 in the UK. An 80-minute, 22-song epic, *Notes...* saw the group experimenting with everything from stoner rock and Americana to UK garage and IDM.

After taking some time off, the four members of The 1975 – Hann, vocalist/guitarist Matty Healy, bassist Ross MacDonald and drummer George Daniel – regrouped to record a shorter, more intimate sounding album, *Being Funny In A Foreign Language*, which was released earlier this month. Trying to get the very best out of themselves as both writers and players, the group teamed up with superstar producer Jack Antonoff, acclaimed for his work with big-name artists such as Taylor Swift, St. Vincent and Haim. "I think we'd had this really difficult experience with the fourth album," Adam says, "and I think we just wanted someone who's made a lot of albums and knew what they were doing. Someone who had a different process in the studio..."

Dressed in a crisp white shirt and red polka dot tie while speaking to TG from his London home via Zoom, Adam looks confident and rejuvenated following his return to the public eye. Some three weeks earlier, the band headlined the prestigious Reading and Leeds Festival for the second time in their career; two sets which doubled as their first UK shows since March 1, 2020. Over a lengthy conversation, Adam talks about his teenage love of metal, how he and Healy play each other's parts live, and the change of direction the band took for their new material: "This time around," he says, "it's all about capturing the moment..."

For your new album, you brought in Jack Antonoff – one of the most in-demand producers in the world. What inspired this decision?

Jack actually works in quite an analogue world. On our third and fourth albums, aside from recording stuff, we'd been in this digital world where we'd record everything in the box. We just wanted to try and step away from that and give it some humanity. That was one of the main reasons for getting Jack, alongside just needing a safe pair of

HAPPINESS
Adam during tour rehearsals (above) and onstage at Summer Sonic Festival in Tokyo, August 2022, wielding his custom-painted Music Man JP6.

hands, really. Someone to help carry the load. Our first and second albums [2013's *The 1975* and 2016's *I Like It When You Sleep, For You Are So Beautiful Yet So Unaware Of It*] were a co-production with George [Daniel], Matthew [Healy] and [producer] Mike Crossey, but the third [2018's *A Brief Inquiry Into Online Relationships*] and fourth [*Notes...*] we did all on our own. It was a great experience, but I think when it came to this album we just wanted to be more like the artists, even though it's still a co-production. We just needed a new energy brought to the session, which was definitely the case.

Matty has spoken about this album really highlighting your ability as musicians, not just songwriters and producers.
It's one of those funny things. We've always made a demo in the box or recorded parts for a demo and then gone to a studio and re-recorded stuff, and then you get to playing it live and then all of a sudden, because you've never really played it together as a band before, you think about it in a different way, and there's ideas that you didn't think of at the time when you were in the studio focusing on recording that one guitar part. There are a few tracks on this record where we just played live in the studio, and at Real World [Peter Gabriel's studio in Box, Wiltshire], where we recorded most of the album, there's an amazing control room that's big enough to have everything set up all at once. In an average studio session you'd record the drums, then take everything down and record guitars, but we wanted to leave everything up. We wanted to just play together and record it and have that be the genesis of the track instead of, like, tracking drums then bass, that kind of thing. It brought a real humanity to the record. As a musician, it was a much different experience this time. Previously I'd just focus on a part and do, like, a gazillion takes. This time, you'd come to it and make the part and play the part at the same time, and it was more about capturing the moment. Jack would be like, 'grab a guitar, play something over this'. You'd do it once or twice and he'd be like, 'Cool, done'. We were like, 'Okay... are you sure?' [Laughs].

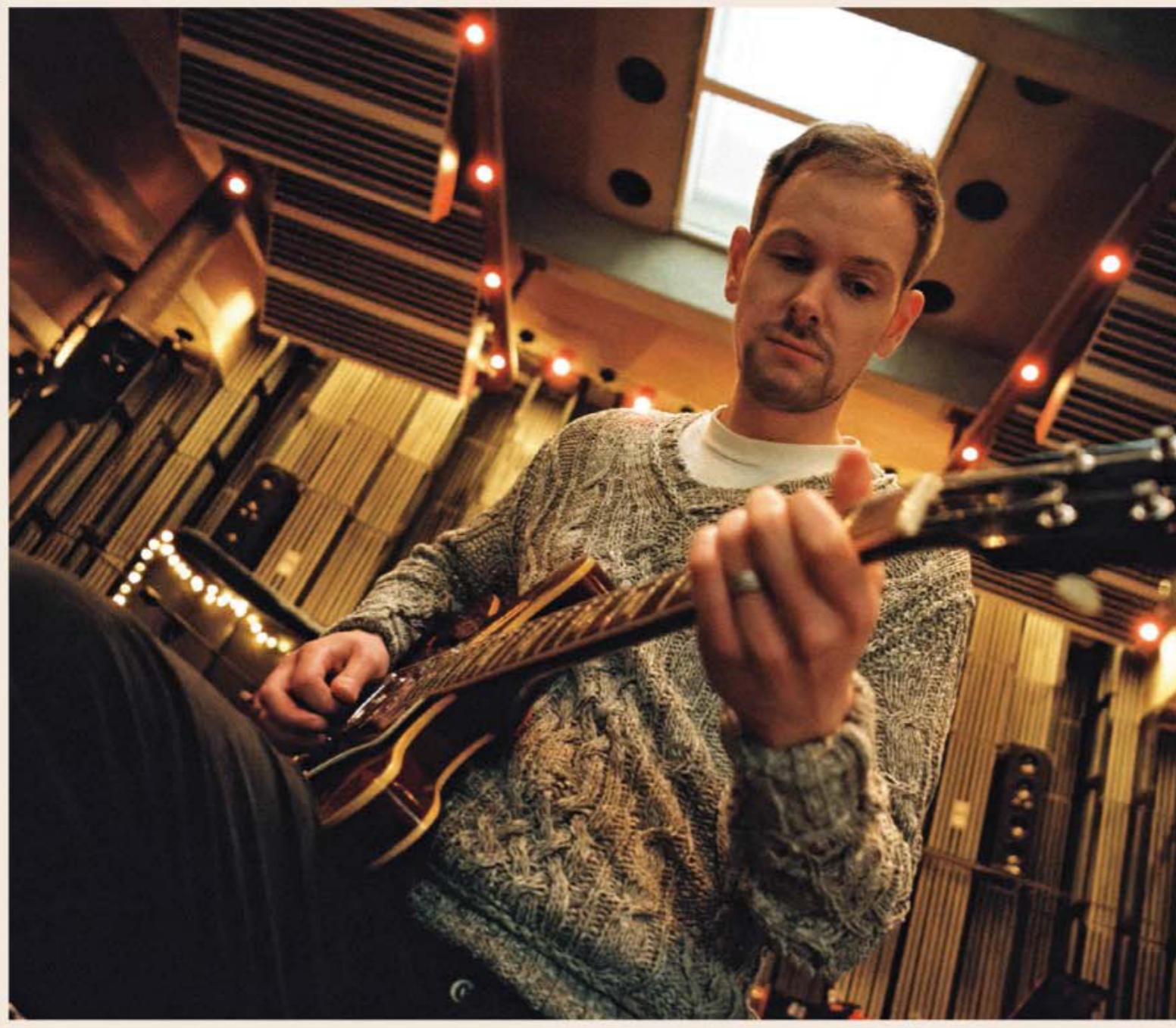
Did Jack have any ideas about your approach to playing or tracking at all?
Jack was all about 'the moment' – that your first instinct is your best instinct. So whatever we do naturally, that was what we used. It also kept the energy up, so it wasn't like we were sat around for two hours doing guitar takes on the f*cking verse guitar, you know? You'd do a couple takes and then you'd move on, you'd move to keys or whatever. It kept this energy going that we'd never experienced before. You also felt a bit of pressure that you'd never felt before in this studio, which was interesting!

In a band as tight and considered as The 1975, do you get the chance to improvise much?
Yeah, for sure. Obviously there are parts put in demos that are going to be the parts, but there was a lot of improvising done to create the parts in those moments. It felt uncomfortable at first, because like you said, everything previously had been very considered. You'd play a part and go in and sit with it or tweak it a bit and it was all very methodical and processed. Whereas this time it was just capturing the moment instead of constructing a part. That's where you convey the humanity in the recording. We stayed away from heavily editing and heavily comping to give it a more human feel.

The lead break in *Happiness* is a particular album highlight. It was great to see you get the chance to rip it up live in your Reading set.
That solo is funny because it originally started on an electric guitar, and it was this kind of fuzz, bitcrushed thing like you'd hear on a Daft Punk record. When it came to recording it, it just felt too obvious, so we thought, 'What have we never done before?' We'd never done anything like that on an acoustic guitar, so we just decided to do that. When it came to playing it live, we thought, 'Do we change and pick up an acoustic guitar for this bit?' We did that in rehearsal and it was a bit awkward, and, for Reading at least, we decided we weren't quite happy with the way it was sounding and so we used an electric guitar with an acoustic simulator. It doesn't sound like an acoustic, but it definitely has a vibe.

You've been playing your Music Man John Petrucci JP6 signature model on stage recently.
Yeah. I bought it with money I inherited from my grandmother when I was a teenager. I was going through this phase of being a big metalhead, and then we started doing The 1975, and it kind of got put away and never used. Then, on our second album, our manager was like, 'Bring that guitar, maybe you'll use it for something' and it turned out to be the backbone for a lot of the guitar [tracks]. In the middle [pickup] position it sounds like this

"IN THE STUDIO, WE NEVER REALLY THINK, 'CAN WE PLAY THIS LIVE?'"



insane Strat-elite because it has this very clear, very clean active sound, but it's not an active guitar. It has this little rubber washer that's been put over the pickup selector, so it can't go either way, it has to stay in the middle. It's funny; we've searched since using that guitar for another guitar that can do that sound, and it doesn't seem to be something we can find. We've come close, but nothing has the same tone.

It's cool seeing a non-metal band using a guitar like that.
[Laughs] It's pretty bizarre, right?

Can you tell us about the amps you used on the new album?
Previously, we had a staple of amps that we'd always go to. One of those was a Roland JC-120, which actually we didn't touch this time around. The vast majority of the clean guitars were recorded on this 60s Fender Vibrolux that they had in the studio, which was for sale for some ungodly price, but it was a very good amp. For anything driven, we used an Audio Kitchen Little Chopper, which we've used on a few albums now. On *All I Need To Hear*, there's a driven guitar that Matty's playing that's straight DI'd into a preamp; there's no amp involved. It's one of those Chandler Limited Abbey Road TG preamps that's driven to max and it gets this unique, very cool sound.

What percentage of the album is your playing and what is Matty's?
It's definitely a solid 50/50 split in that I play on every track and Matty plays on every track, and often we will both end up doing a take of the same part, and which one gets used is not something that gets decided democratically but rather in the mixing stage. There's definitely parts I play live that he played on the record. Funnily enough, at the end of *Part Of The Band*, I played the acoustic guitar and he played electric. Live, we swapped that around, because in the chorus of that song it's acoustic guitar and vocal and it made sense for him to play it, and then we're not just gonna swap for the outro. So I have to learn his parts and he has to learn some of mine. We've been playing together for so long now, it's kind of obvious to us that, regardless of who played it in the studio, it's like, 'you'll play that live, I'll play this'. There's an unspoken agreement. We've played together since we were in high school, and it just becomes second nature to learn everyone's strengths and weaknesses, and what they're able to do best.

PART OF THE BAND
Adam in the studio in January 2022.

Has the dynamic between you changed over the years?
For sure. Live, we have one of our really good friends who we've known for over 10 years play keys and guitar with us as well, and just now we've added another keys and guitar player, because when you get caught up in the moment you sort of lose track. In the studio, we never really think, 'Can we play this live?' That's not a thing we consider whatsoever. Sometimes we get carried away and then at the end realise, 'Oh sh*t, this is insane!' In the mix, they've done a great job of balancing this, but at one point towards the end of *I'm In Love With You*, there's nine guitar parts going on simultaneously. The balance is clever so it doesn't sound like that when you're listening, but when you open up the stems and think, 'what are we gonna play?', you have to pick three parts from these nine to work on.

Have you picked up anything interesting recently, gear-wise?
Our manager is an avid collector of vintage guitars, and he has a very nice Fiesta Red vintage Strat. It's early 60s and ludicrously expensive, and was used throughout the album as one of the main guitars. I'm in the market for a vintage Strat, but it's just the money – I feel like the price of gear is insane now for some reason. Five or six years ago I bought a Klon Centaur for like $900, which is still a lot of f*cking money for an overdrive pedal, but we were looking the other day and they're selling now for like £5000! So if I can bring myself to part with the money I am in the market for a vintage Strat, which is a big commitment from the bank. I need a really solid main guitar. But we didn't really buy much gear this time around, which is unusual.

"I PLAY ON EVERY TRACK AND MATTY PLAYS ON EVERY TRACK"

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HOW TO PLAY BLUES

If you're raring to play the blues this month, boy have we got just the feature for you as we look at 20 ways to improve your playing. We kick off with a handful of tips to help you polish up those essential chords, progressions and soloing techniques. Then, with the basics covered, we move on to some 'play in the style of' lessons on everything from post-war vintage blues artists, right up to today's finest players. We wrap up with four jam tracks for you to try out everything you've learned.

Across 20 pages we profile the greatest blues guitarists of all time – from early innovators such as Robert Johnson and Sister Rosetta Tharpe all the way through to 21st Century masters Gary Clark Jr. and Eric Gales.

With a new album from Buddy Guy released this month, we celebrate the career of the last of the electric blues pioneers. And with a new live album from The Jimi Hendrix Experience also out now – recorded in 1969, and featuring his classic blues number *Red House* – we examine how Jimi put his own unique spin on the genre.

Finally, we speak to two bands shaping the sound of the blues in 2022 – Larkin Poe and GA-20.

Words Jonathan Horsley, Neville Marten, Ellie Rogers, Jenna Scaramanga, Jon Bishop, Richard Barrett

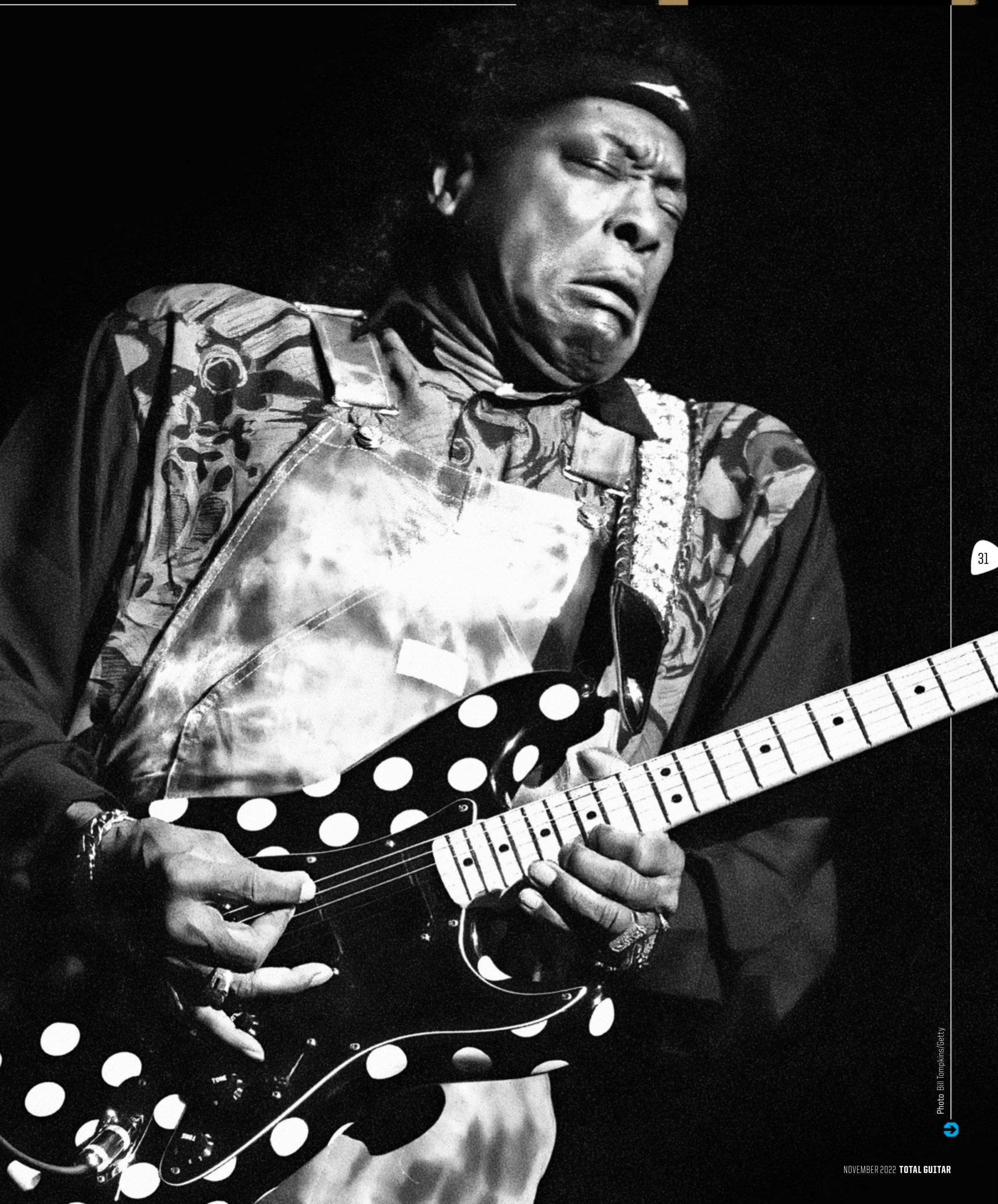


Photo Bill Tompkins/Getty

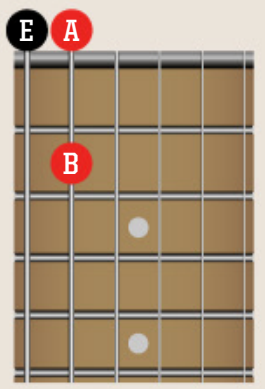
BLUES TIPS

Improve your blues guitar playing with our lessons on essential chords, progressions, soloing techniques and a couple of star tips. Plug in, and let's get your mojo workin'...

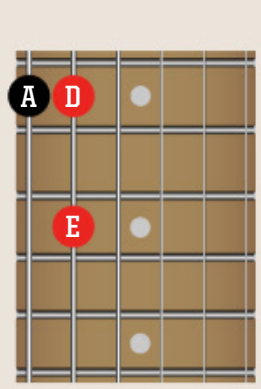
MASTER THE I-IV-V PROGRESSION

Get to grips with the most important chord progression and you'll always know where you are in any 12-bar blues jam

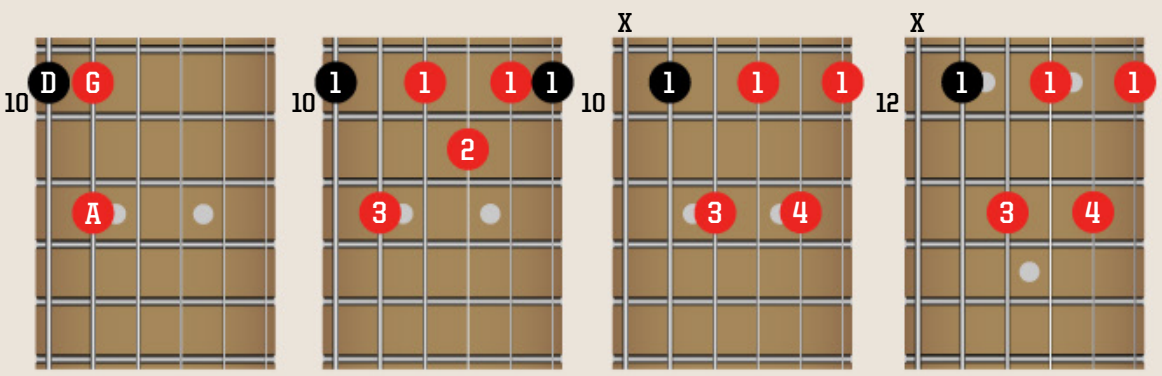
The most common blues chord progression is the I-IV-V (one-four-five), so called because the chords are built upon the first, fourth and fifth notes in the relevant major scale. So if we tell you that the notes in the key of C are C, D, E, F, G, A and B, it's easy enough to tell that a I-IV-V follows the C (first), F (fourth) and G (fifth) chords. Still with us? It's hard to remember the right notes for every key, but you can work out the right chords just by using the notes on the two lowest strings...



BLUES IN E
The notes in the key of E are E, F♯, G♯, A, B, C♯ and D♯, so a I-IV-V progression uses chords built on E, A and B as shown here.



BLUES IN A
In the key of A the notes are A, B, C♯, D, E, F♯ and G♯. Moving up the fretboard, you can see the notes are in the same relative positions as in E.



BLUES IN D
Starting on D, now you can work out where the I, IV and V root notes are without knowing the scale.

BUILDING THE CHORD SEQUENCE
Staying in D for now, you can use these chord shapes to build a I-IV-V progression. Obviously their root notes are the notes we just identified. So, with a pattern for the I-IV-V notes established and a chord for each note provided, all you need to play in any key is to move to the relevant starting point on the sixth string. Easy!

Photo Getty

ESSENTIAL LEAD GUITAR TECHNIQUES

Don't leave home without 'em! Five ways to improve your solos

UNISON BEND

1 Two strings are played at the same time, with the lower one bent up to the pitch of the higher string.

Hear it:
Jimi Hendrix – *Highway Chile* (0:00-0:14)

QUARTER-TONE BEND

2 The idea is to bend the string by roughly half a semitone. Listen carefully to the 'curl' on the C note in Buddy Guy's riff.

Hear it:
Buddy Guy – *Damn Right, I've Got The Blues* (0:10)

VIBRATO

3 It's rare to find a blues solo without vibrato. Instead of letting a note just ring out, give the string a wobble.

Hear it:
Gary Moore – *Too Tired* (0:07-0:10)

THREE- & FOUR-FRET BENDS

4 You risk snapping strings, but you can't beat the urgency and energy of these huge bends. Try using lighter strings and downtuning!

Hear it:
Albert King – *Oh, Pretty Woman* (1:29-1:31)

STRING RAKES

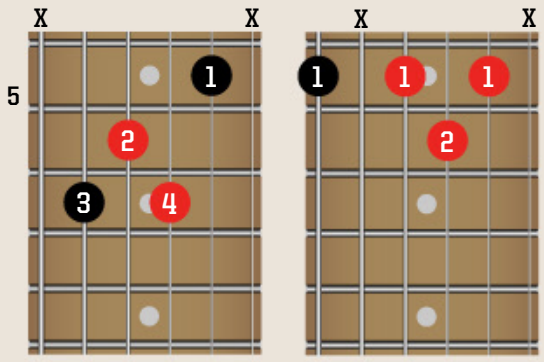
5 Drag your pick over muted strings as you target a normal fretted note at the end of the pick stroke.

Hear it:
Stevie Ray Vaughan – *Cold Shot* (0:00-0:18)

LEARN MORE CHORDS

Take your blues jams to the next level with 10 inspiring shapes

We've just looked at the good old E- and A-shape barre chords. They provide ample ways for you to jam over any chord progression you could ever be faced with. However, there are loads more inspiring shapes to try. Shapes with a little more authentic bluesiness about them. Here we've presented 10 shapes for you to try out in a I-IV-V blues progression in E – so, remember, that's E, A and B. Start with E, A and B chords you already know, then try substituting for some of these.



E7

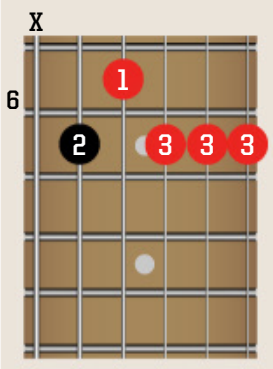
C-SHAPE 7TH CHORD

You might recognise this as a C7 shape when played at the 1st position. Keep the open strings quiet and it's a cool moveable shape that's great for blues and jazz.

A7

BARRE CHORD FRAGMENT

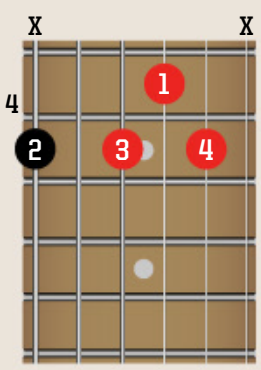
This one's based on a well known barre chord shape, but, by ditching the fifth string, the bass note has more clarity, and overall there's a less 'predictable' sound.



E9

ESSENTIAL 9TH CHORD

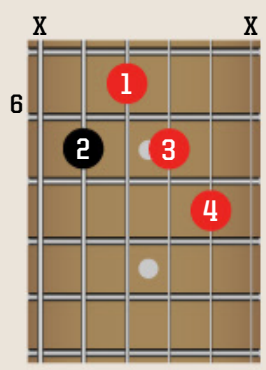
This 9th chord is well used but it sounds better than basic barre chords. Try sliding in from one semitone above or below in a slow blues.



A9

ALTERNATIVE 9TH CHORD

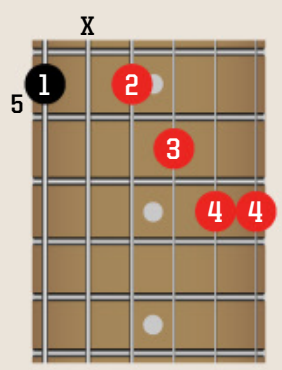
This shape benefits from the same clarity in the bass as our barre chord fragment, and for the same reason. Remove the fifth string for a clearer bottom end.



E7#9

THE HENDRIX CHORD

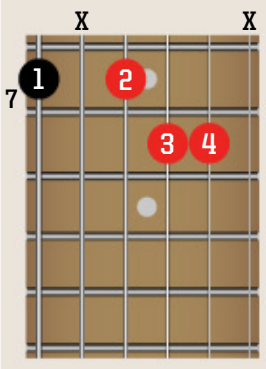
Hendrix is famous for using this chord in songs like *Purple Haze*. Forget that for now. The point is it sounds great as the V chord in a I-IV-V blues progression.



A13

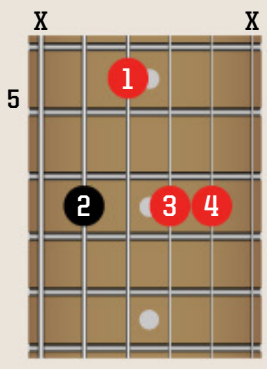
SOPHISTICATED SOUNDS

There's a rich, jazzy vibe to this 13th chord which lends itself to exposed guitar parts where its sophistication can be heard, perhaps in slow, soulful ballads.



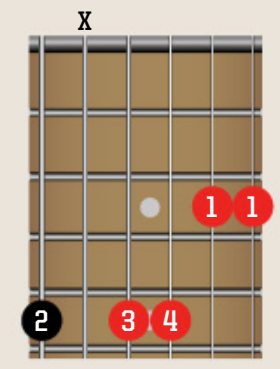
B7#5

THE 'ALTERED' CHORD

When a dominant 7th chord (B7, A7 etc) just doesn't have enough harmonic 'bite', try this one out. Its #5th adds more dissonance to proceedings.

Em9

MINOR BLUES I CHORD

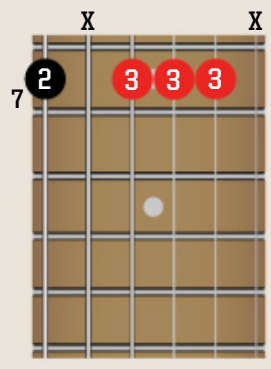
Switching to a blues in E minor (Em-Am-Bm) now, there's a laid back sound to this minor 9th chord that sounds great allied to a Dorian mode solo.



Am11

MINOR BLUES IV CHORD

You could stick to Am or Am7, but why not build on our minor 9th opener with this lovely minor 11th on the IV chord.



Bm7

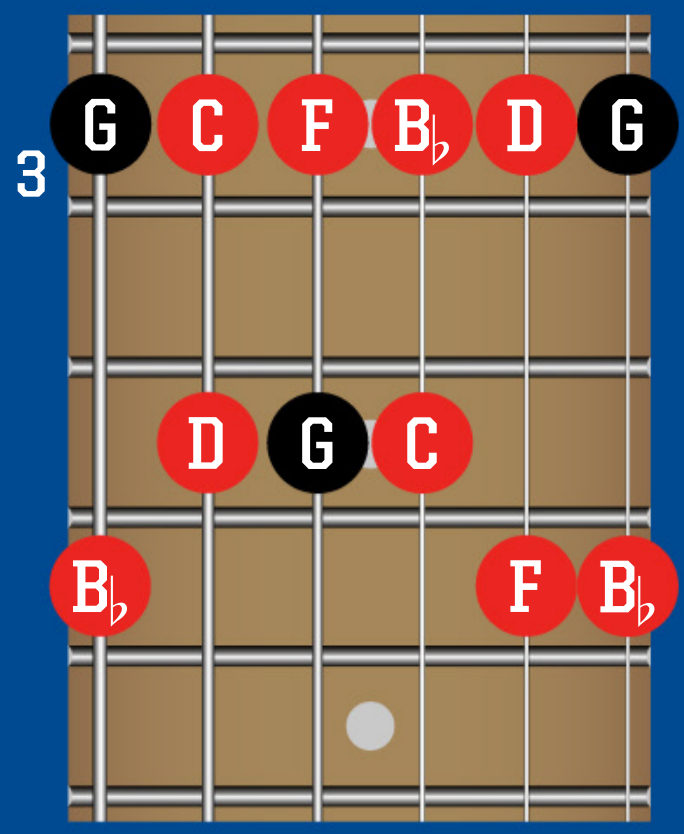
MINOR BLUES V CHORD

Rounding out the minor blues chords, you'll find it easy to vamp around this Bm7 with the Em9 because the two shapes share common notes.

UPGRADE YOUR IMPROVS

Terrified of an impromptu blues jam? Fear not! Follow our five improv tips and your ad libbed solos will soar...

Take a look at this pattern for the G minor pentatonic scale and get used to playing it one note at a time from the lowest note to the highest, then again from high to low. All our improv tips can be applied to this shape.



G minor pentatonic scale

SIMPLE SCALE RUN

1 A run through the notes consecutively is one of the simplest improv ideas. Try starting on the F, before playing G, B♭, C, D, F, then bending up to G.

BACKWARDS

2 Now play your scale run in reverse; it's a great way to develop a good idea. Remember, this is blues so it doesn't matter if it doesn't quite work the same way in reverse. Adapt it so it feels like a completed lick.

RETURN TO THE ROOT

3 Starting once again with your scale run, this time try playing the G root note in between every note or every other note.

THREE-NOTE GROUPS

4 Just look at the scale shape this time as we target some three-note groups. Play G-B♭-C, then B♭-C-D, then C-D-F and so on. Also try in reverse from high to low, G-F-D etc.

ONE-NOTE JAM

5 Develop complex rhythms by jamming on *just one note*! The root note is a logical start point but any note will do. Add more as your one-note rhythmic ideas take shape.

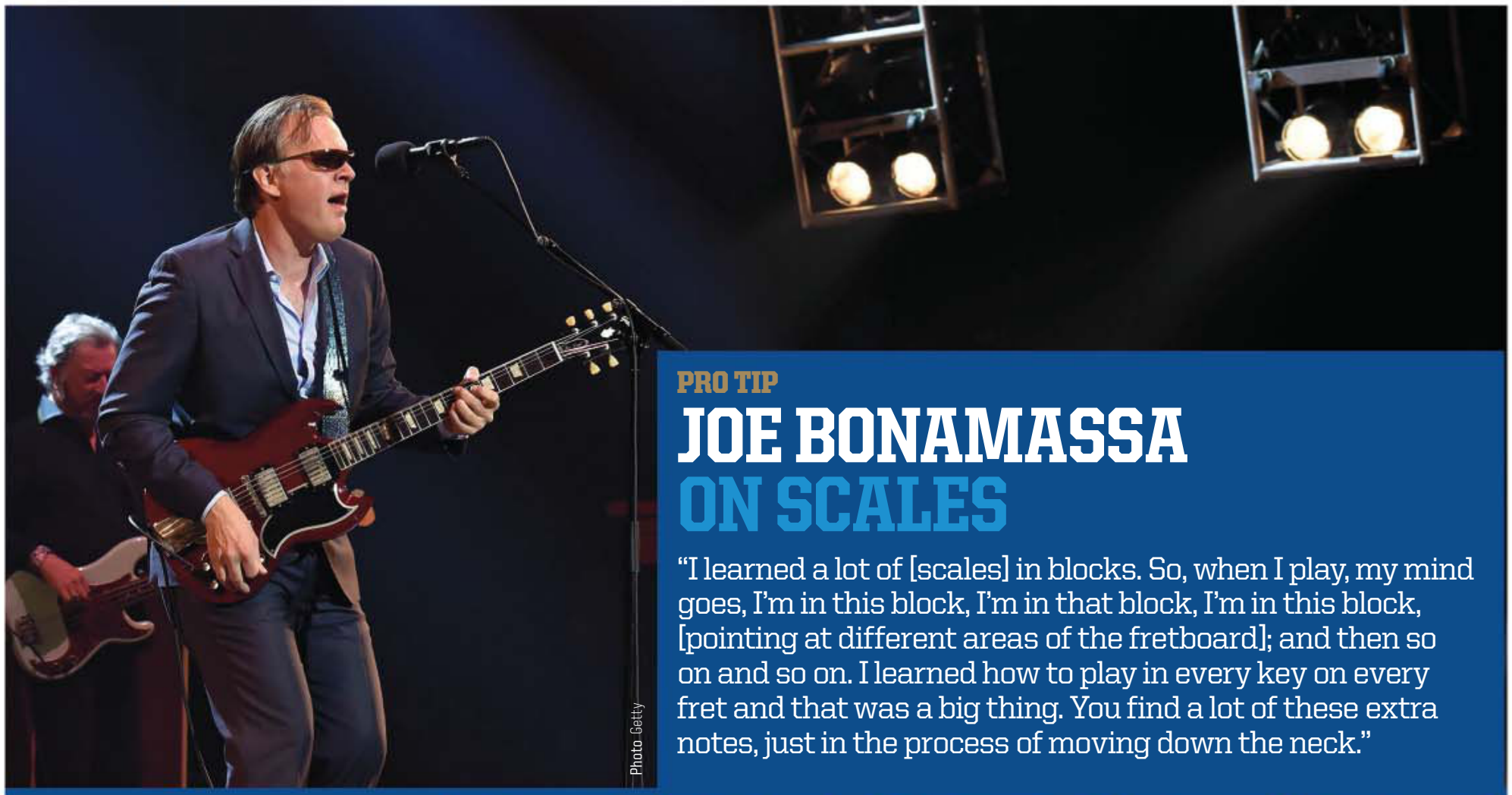


Photo Getty

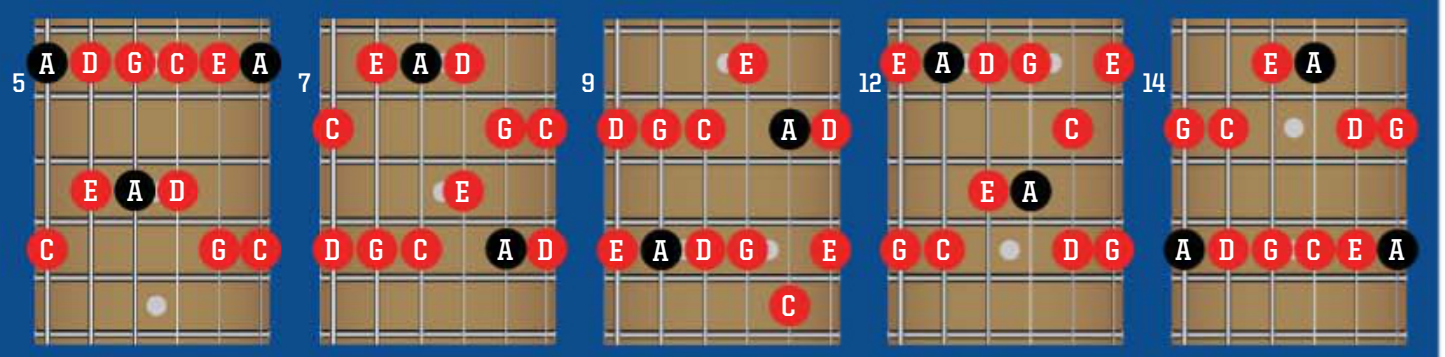
PRO TIP

JOE BONAMASSA ON SCALES

"I learned a lot of [scales] in blocks. So, when I play, my mind goes, I'm in this block, I'm in that block, I'm in this block, [pointing at different areas of the fretboard]; and then so on and so on. I learned how to play in every key on every fret and that was a big thing. You find a lot of these extra notes, just in the process of moving down the neck."

BUILDING THE CHORD SEQUENCE

Learn these five pentatonic scale shapes and, just like Joe Bonamassa, you'll be able to improvise solos that cover the entire fretboard, thinking in blocks as you go. The most important thing to note is that all five shapes are the same scale; that's why you are guaranteed to be in one key across the whole fretboard. Simply move each shape up one fret to play in B♭ – move up another fret for B, and so on.



A minor pentatonic scale (shape 1) | A minor pentatonic scale (shape 2) | A minor pentatonic scale (shape 3) | A minor pentatonic scale (shape 4) | A minor pentatonic scale (shape 5)

PRO TIP

WARREN HAYNES'S SLIDE GUITAR MUTING TIP

"The biggest breakthrough for my slide playing was when I stopped using a pick and started playing with my fingers. [You use] the fingers that you're not plucking the strings with to mute out the strings that you don't want to sound. For example, if I'm using [my first] finger to play the B string, then my thumb is on the bottom strings below it muting out those strings, and my [second and third] fingers are muting out the top strings, so you're only hearing noise coming from the string that you want. It makes a huge difference because there's so much noise coming from the slide and all those overtones that are just horrible. The best way to eliminate those is learning this finger technique. So, if you watch my right hand you can see that I'm constantly muting out the unwanted notes. That's the most important part to becoming a better slide player."

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VINTAGE BLUES ESSENTIALS

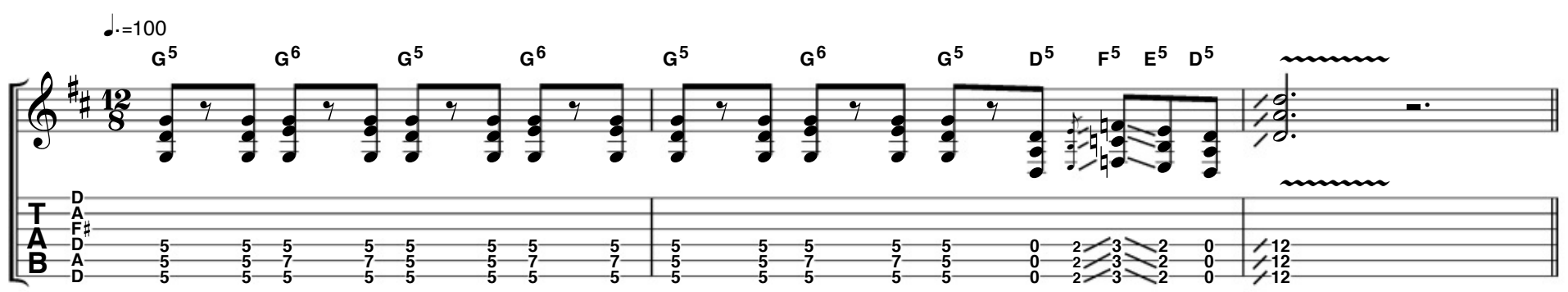
See how early electric blues has influenced rock with our run through five classic riffs

The 1940s and 50s saw an explosion of new blues acts. This was thanks to newly available electric guitars and amplification which made it possible to play at higher volumes and be heard over drums or other loud instruments. Essentially, this was the dawn of the modern band as we now know it.

Here, we're looking at some riffs and licks inspired mostly from the post-war 'plugged in' era – and the Chicago blues scene was a large part of this musical revolution. As such, we're taking our inspiration from greats like Elmore James, Otis Rush, Muddy Waters and Hubert Sumlin.

As you work through the tab it's worth seeing if you can play the licks as rock licks instead of blues – particularly with the lead guitar examples. It's an enlightening way to see just how influential those early blues pioneers

BLUES BOOGIE RIFF **BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO**



Taking inspiration from Elmore James, here's an example of how easy it is to play a classic blues/rock 'n' roll boogie riff in open D tuning. Simply barre the strings with your first finger and add the 'boogie' aspect with your third finger. A slide is optional here – our riff can be played with or without.

Photo Getty

FINGERSTYLE TURNAROUND

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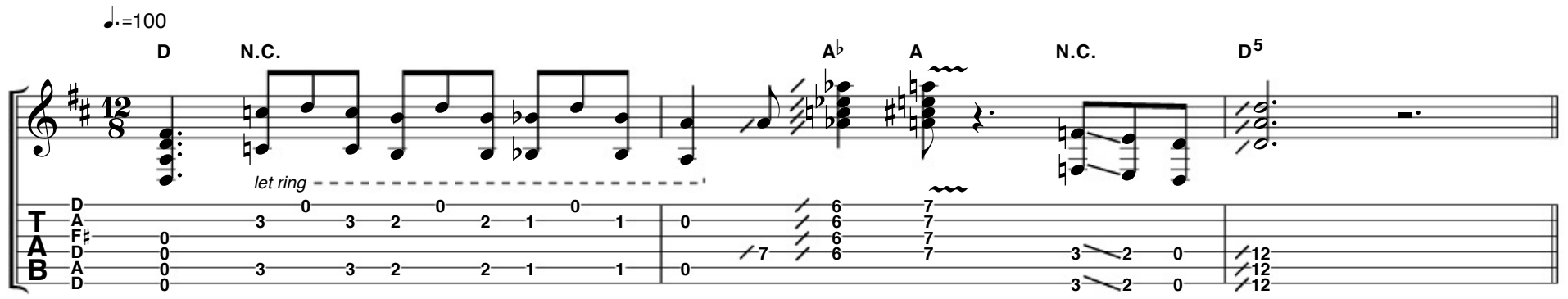
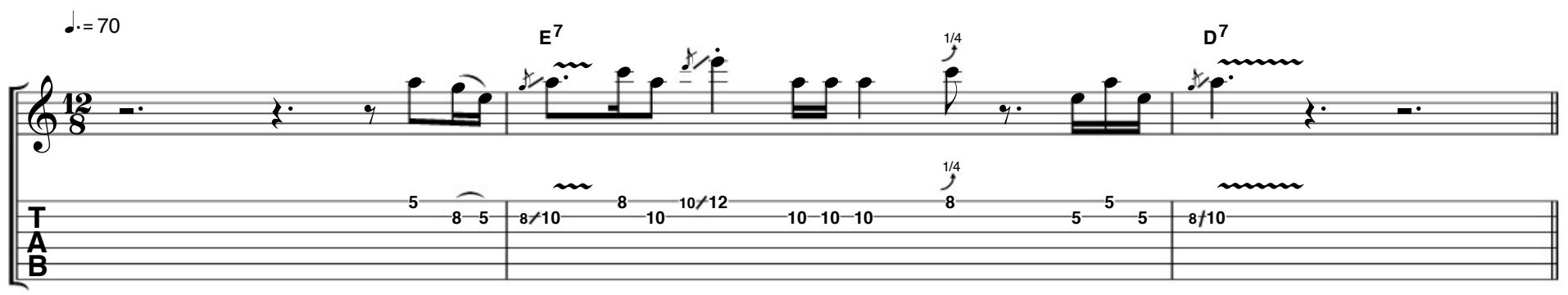


Another Elmore James idea here, but this classic turnaround is also similar to the kind of ideas that Robert Johnson used in the 1930s. These riffs have been handed down from the earliest blues players and are still used today by modern guitarists everywhere. Sounds great on acoustic or with a dirty, distorted tone.

POSITION SHIFT LEAD LICK

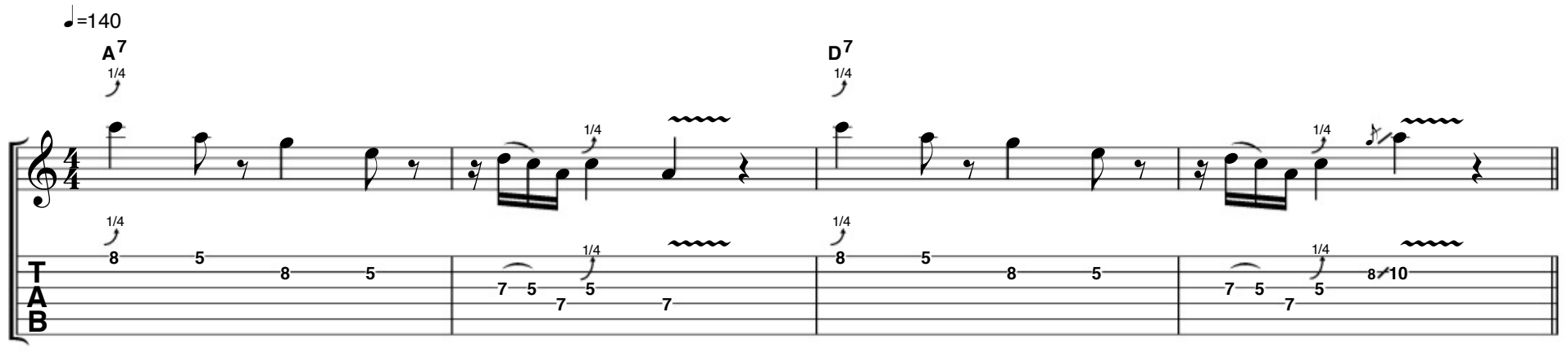
BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO



This example is collection of great lead guitar phrases that many of the Chicago greats would use. It's the kind of phrasing that would subsequently influence blues-rock greats such as Eric Clapton and Jimmy Page. Just watch out for the position shifts.

RHYTHMIC LEAD

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO



We're taking our inspiration from Otis Rush here in a catchy lick with a tricky rhythm. Like so many blues licks, this idea can be made to fit over any chord of a traditional I-IV-V progression, and you can easily tweak a note here or there to make it 'yours'. Just watch out in bars 2 and bar 4, where the opening note is on the second 16th note,

DIAD RIFFS

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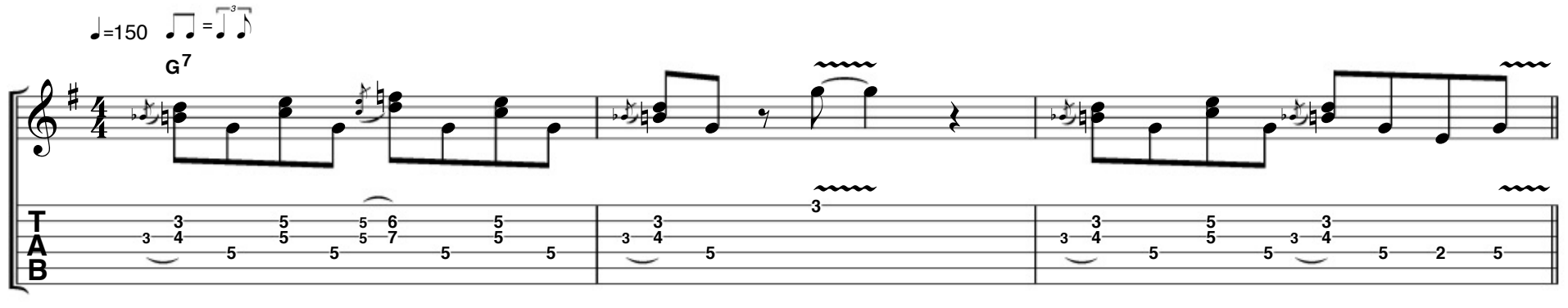
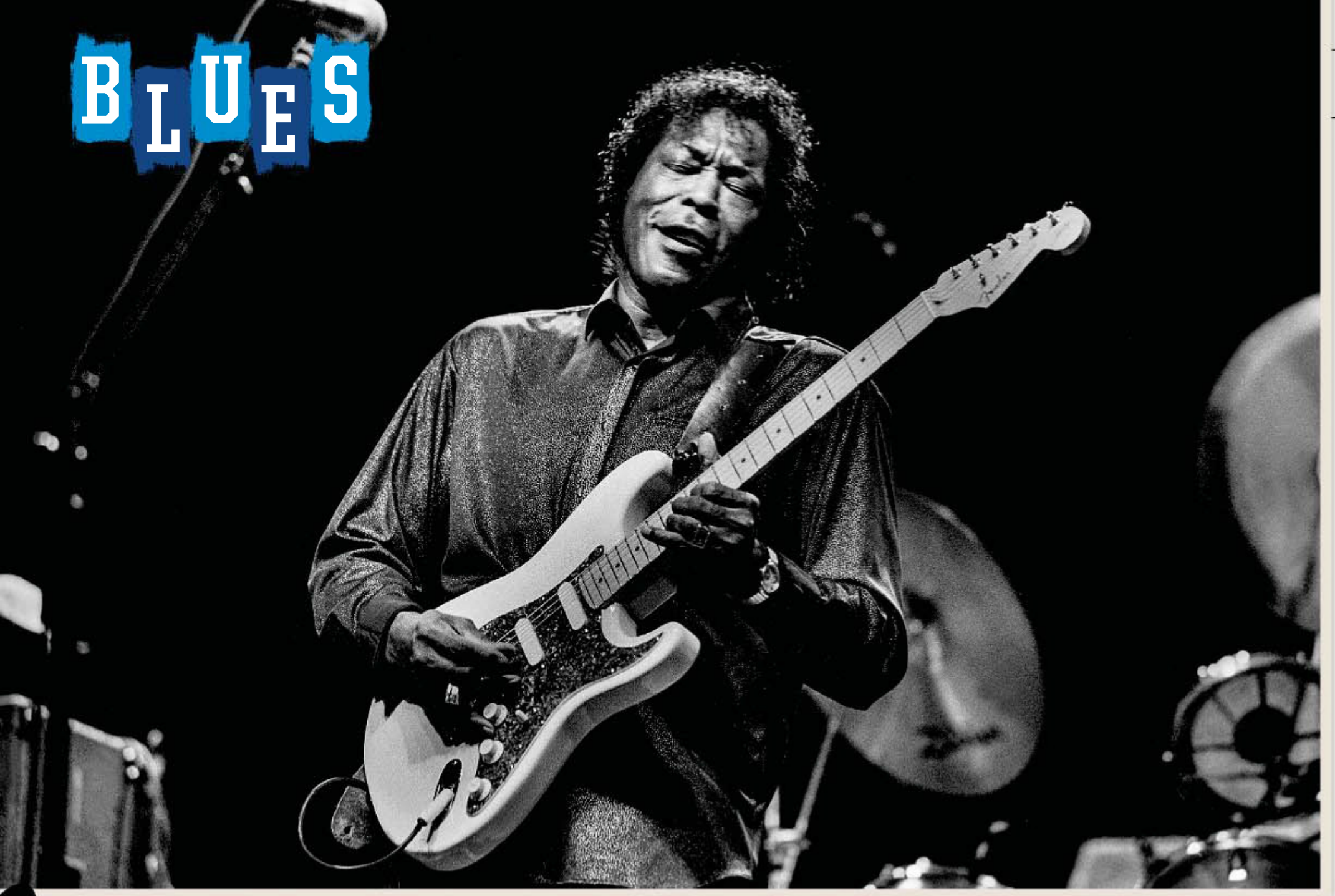


This example features a blues riff performed Hubert Sumlin style, and it's an idea whose influence can be seen in rock acts like Van Halen and AC/DC. For our bluesier purposes, aim for a light shuffle feel and use either fingerstyle or pick and fingers 'hybrid' style picking.



Guitars and backing Richard Barrett

STORY OF THE BLUES

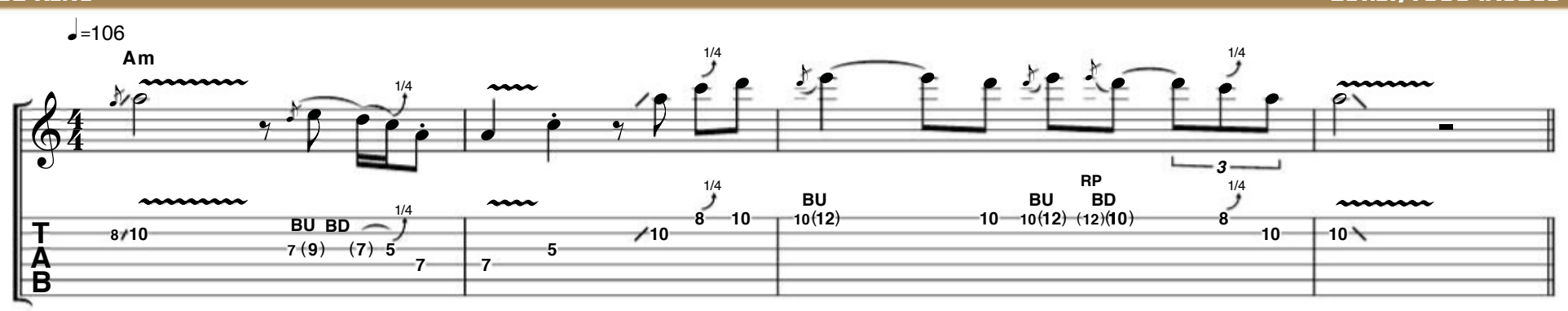
We chart the playing styles of five of the greatest blues players through the ages...

Here we're looking at the techniques and playing styles of five of the most important blues guitarists of all time. We begin with arguably the greatest of them all, BB King, moving through the 60s and 70s with Peter Green, the 80s with Texas blues icon Stevie Ray Vaughan, before wrapping up with the 'modern' styles of Gary Moore and Eric Gales.

Whatever style of music you play there's something to learn here, such is the depth of these players' abilities. From techniques to make your solos more expressive to cool chords that'll give your playing an edge in your next blues jam, there really is a huge amount covered here.

If you struggle with any of our licks, don't worry too much – blues can be reinvented and re-imagined. By which we mean, you can break these licks down, take a few choice phrases and them apply in countless different ways in your own jam sessions. Now, let's get started...

BB KING **BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO**



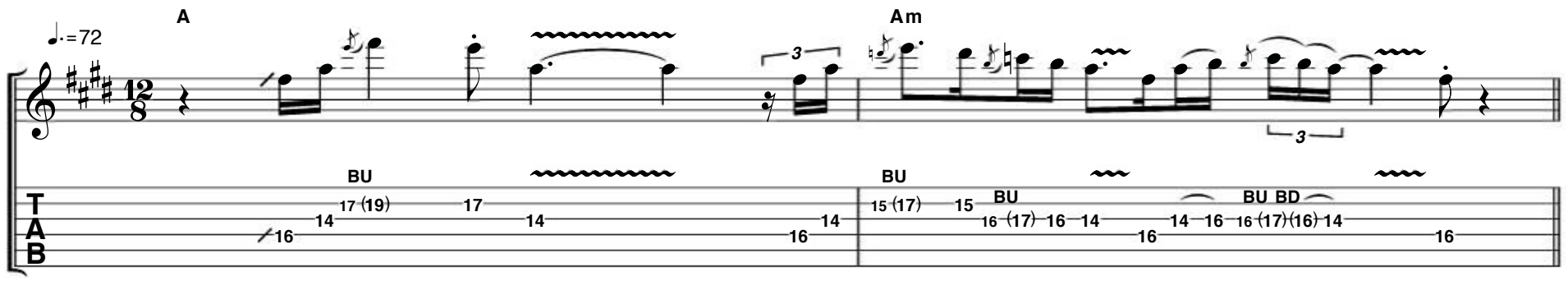
One of the most influential electric guitarists of any genre, BB King is best known for his 'question and answer' phrasing, trademark shallow vibrato and vocal-like string bends – and these are all at play here. As an exercise see if you can stretch our lick out over eight bars by using longer notes and phrases, and more space.

Photo Getty

FULL TRACK + BACKING (BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO)
This song comes with a full demo track and backing track. Enter the above link into your web browser of choice; press play and jam along, guitaraoke style!

PETER GREEN

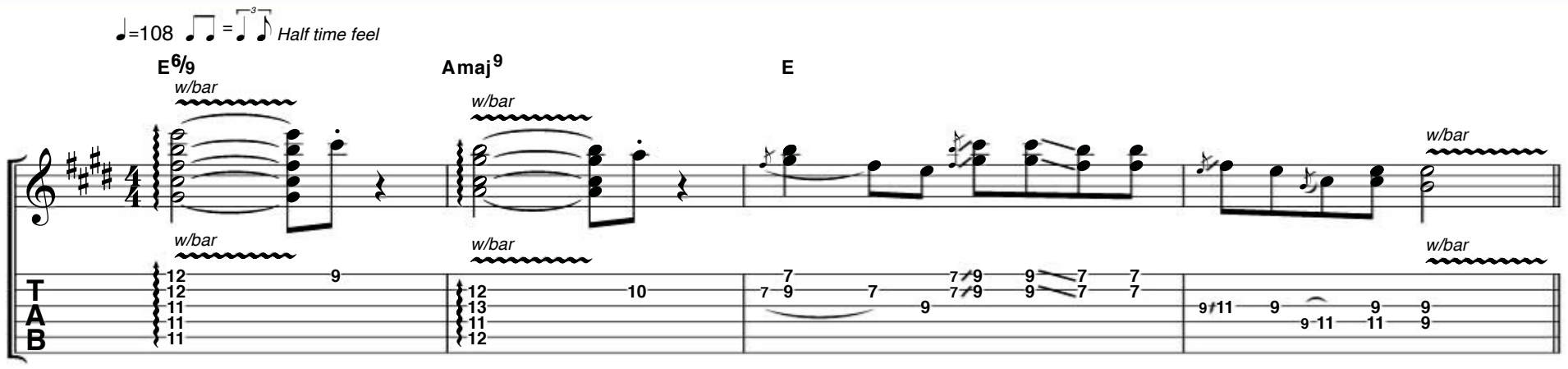
BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO



As one of many 60s blues icons who took influence from BB King, Freddie King, Muddy Waters and other post-war pioneers, Peter Green's style is often precise, with a considered note choice and a unique tone. You can hear that precision here in our lick which focuses on Peter's melodic style over a 12/8-time ballad. Emphasise the higher notes to really cut through. Bar 2 has a laidback feel, played 'late' against the pulse of the music.

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN

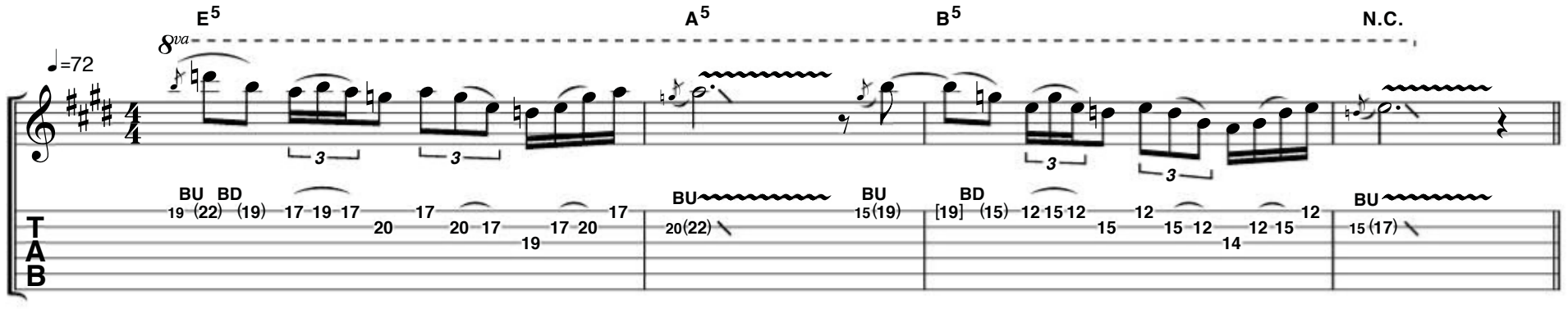
BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO



Probably known best for his fiery uptempo playing style, Stevie Ray Vaughan would also play with great sensitivity, and that's what inspired us here in a lick that showcases how chords can be used melodically in a blues ballad. The shapes may be unfamiliar at first but they are fairly easy to get to grips with. The Hendrix-style two-note shapes are another lovely way to play both melodically and chordally.

GARY MOORE

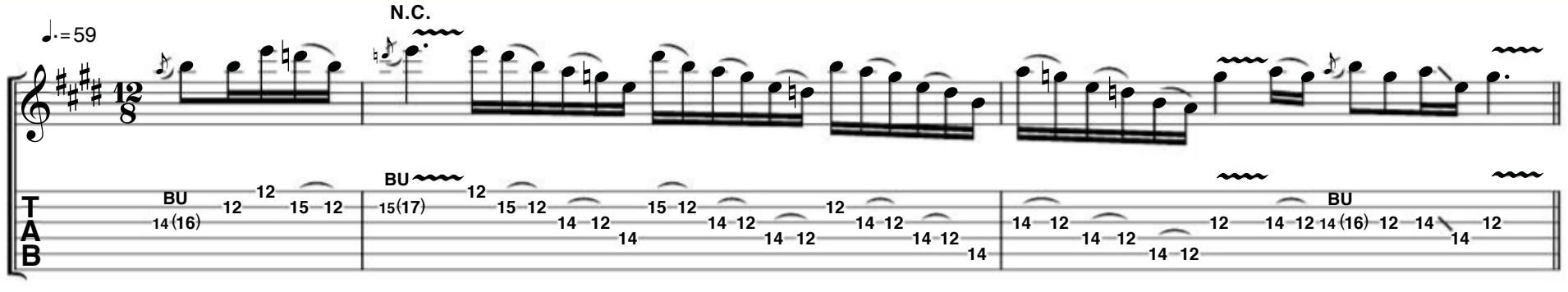
BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO



On 1990's *Still Got The Blues*, Gary Moore brought new levels of intensity and virtuosity to blues, arguably steering the entire genre in a new 'modern' direction. Our example showcases some wide, high-register string bends and the crucial rhythmic variation of triplets and 16th notes that are at the core of his style. It provides a hint of how Gary played those rapid-fire licks in tracks like *Walking By Myself*, using a mixture of picked notes with hammer-ons and pull-offs.

ERIC GALES

BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO



Eric Galeș is one of the finest lead players around today, channeling the authenticity of post-war pioneers and employing contemporary techniques to form his own powerful style. Here we're looking at an idea the Eric introduced to TG in a Guest Lesson back in issue 250: up the stairs, down the stairs. There's more 'downstairs' here in our lick, but you can see how he uses fragments of the minor pentatonic scale, starting on different notes each time to produce a complex melodic run.

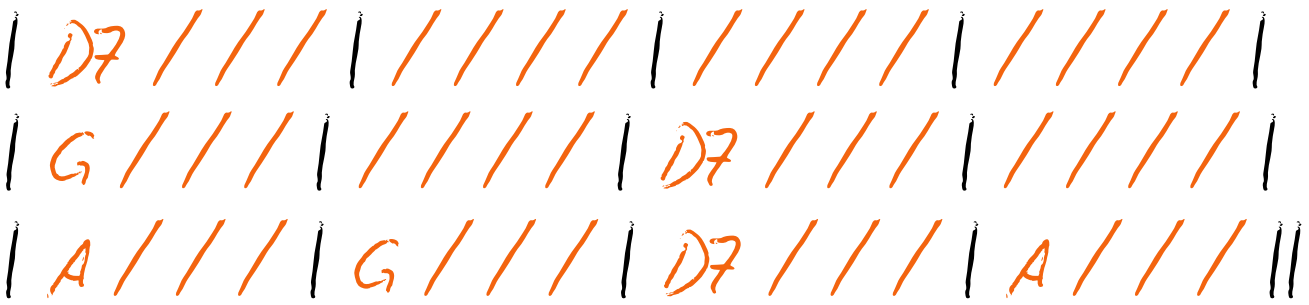
JAM SESSION

Take everything you've learnt and get your mojo working' as you jam over four awesome backing tracks

So here we are at the end of our big blues lesson, and this is where you put everything you've learned into practice! Wit that in mind, we've produced four jam tracks for you to play over. The chord charts are below. Start by familiarising yourself with the chords, but beware! Some of the tracks are more riff-based, so the chords only roughly outline the movement. If we have a tip, it's to try and learn a chord shape in the same area of the neck that you plan on soloing. This'll help you to target some chord notes in your solos so that you're not always thinking in terms of scale shapes. Each track is inspired by a blues icon – and we're following three different key signatures so you can really test yourself. Right, let's get jamming!

ALBERT KING

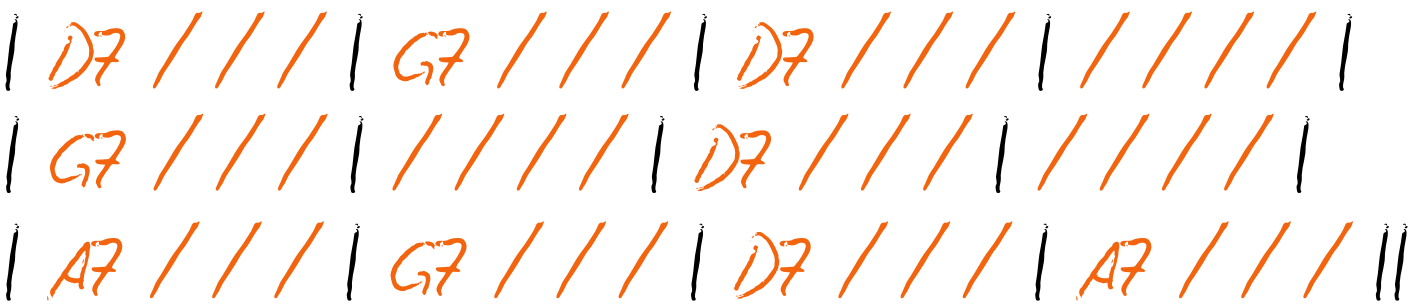
BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO



Listen out for the bassline here. It really leads the ear, helping you to anticipate the chord changes and choose a suitable note to land on as you reach each new chord.

ALBERT COLLINS

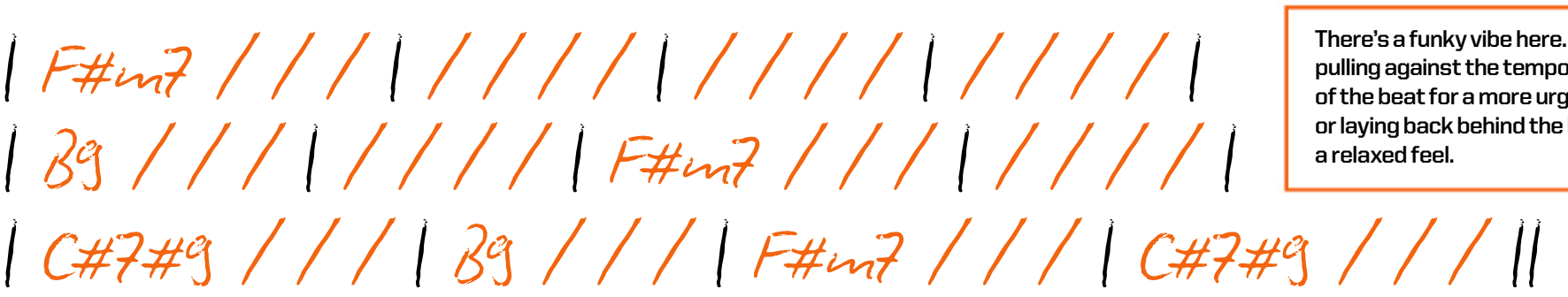
BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO



This is a standard 12-bar blues pattern. Try using the D major pentatonic scale throughout, switching to D minor pentatonic for a more dissonant, biting sound.

JOHN MAYER

BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO



There's a funky vibe here. Try pushing or pulling against the tempo, playing ahead of the beat for a more urgent sound or laying back behind the beat for a relaxed feel.

GARY CLARKE JR

BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO

There's more chord movement than our other tracks here. So, though you could stick to just the G minor pentatonic scale, it's worth trying out C Dorian over Cm7, and D natural minor over Dm7.

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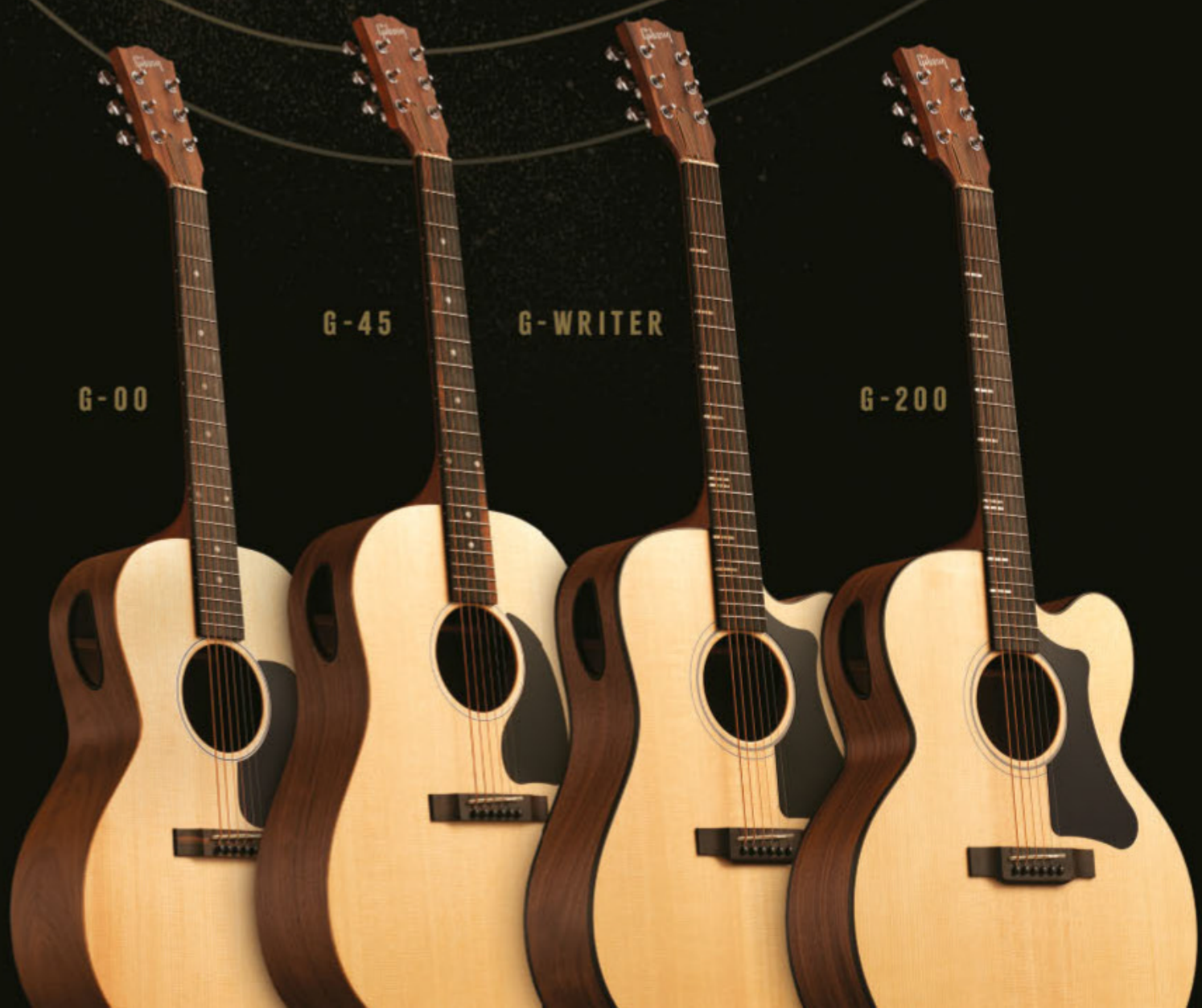

BLUES POWER

Thinking about new gear for blues? Follow our guide to the best equipment on sale, and dial in your best ever tone!

If you're anything like us, when you're inspired to play guitar you'll often find yourself gassing for new gear. The most versatile option is to go digital: there are loads ands loads of you amplifiers, foot-pedals and floorboards loaded with countless effects and amp models that'll cover almost any conceivable playing scenario. But for the blues purist, analogue is the way to go.

Read on as we run through some of the best gear options available today for the aspiring blues hound. And while tone is foremost in our mind here, we've also got one eye on versatility, too.

GUITARS

Your tonal journey begins with the instrument in your hands. We look at some of the best bluesy options around today

SINGLE-COIL GUITARS

Fender's long-serving Stratocaster rules the roost when it comes to single-coil blues. Just ask Stevie Ray Vaughan, Eric Clapton, Buddy Guy, Robert Cray... we could go on! Fender will sell you a Guy or Cray artist model for £999, with the former arguably the more versatile option thanks to its vintage style tremolo compared to the hard-tail unit on the Cray model. Alternatively, save some cash and opt out of artist signature models with Squier's Classic Vibe 60s Strat (£355). You'll find a bevvy of Teles in the CV series too should you wish to get your Muddy Waters or Albert King vibe going.

HUMBUCKER GUITARS

Joe Bonamassa knows a thing or two about blues tone, and Epiphone's Joe Bonamassa Lazarus 1959 Les Paul Standard is an all-round tonal monster, great for blues and a bit of everything else. We gave it our coveted Platinum Award back in January. Gretsch's G5220 Electromatic Jet is a great twin 'bucker single-cut alternative. Its Broad'Tron pickups have a sweet high end that's great for shimmering cleans. Alternatively, the Little Buckers on Guild's S-200 T-Bird will do a fine turn at anything from Muddy Waters and The Black Keys (who both played S-200s) to AC/DC and Black Sabbath.

SEMI-ACOUSTIC GUITARS

One of the most versatile semis available right now is Epiphone's BB King Lucille tribute model. A six-position Varitone switch gives you 18 possible pickup settings, and its f-hole-less, centre-blocked body ensures it shouldn't squeal out too much feedback in higher gain settings. D'Angelico's Premier Bedford SH also scores high for its all-round game, featuring T-style pickups in the neck and middle positions, plus a mini-bucker in the bridge. There's a six-point tremolo unit, too, unusual on a semi-acoustic, but really handy on a guitar that needs to do more than blues.

AMPLIFIERS

For pure blues tone, valves still rule the roost. But which amp should you use? Read on as we narrow down your options

FENDER BLUES JR IV

Quite possibly the world's favourite blues amp, and now in its fourth generation, the Blues Jr is loved for its compact portability and single-channel front end that can be dialed in for luscious cleans that work great with pedals, or turned up for spongy overdrive. Take it to the edge of break-up, throw a Tube Screamer in front of it, and it'll get you in the same ballpark as Stevie Ray Vaughan. Alternatively, just dime it and use your guitar's volume control to keep things orderly.

LANEY CUB-SUPER

This is a boutique amp in a production-line amp's Tolex, and, frankly, it has no right to sound as good as it does. This stylish little combo has pretty much everything a blues player could want. There's plenty of volume, whilst also being equipped with an attenuated one-watt input for low-volume performances. Its on-board boost will keep you cutting through the mix when you take a solo, and the digital reverb is top quality. Available in both 1x12, 1x10 and head variants.

SUPRO DELTA KING

Another contender in the Fender Blues Junior's affordable small valve combo market. Style-wise, the four racing stripes are a knowing throwback to the brand's heritage. However, the brain and guts of the amplifier are more in tune with the 21st-century trend of high-functioning yet eminently affordable tube amplifiers. Like the Laney, the combos are available in 1x10 and 1x12 inch versions, though there is no head option.

DRIVE AND EFFECTS

Effects may be surplus to requirements for some blues players, but we'd say there are some essentials for everyone's pedalboard

OVERDRIVE
IBANEZ TUBE SCREAMER

If its signature mid boost was good enough for Stevie Ray Vaughan... Available in compact 'mini' form.

MXR TIMMY

With three clipping modes this is a versatile drive that's great for kicking any tube amp into rich saturation.

WAMPLER TUMNUS MINI

Wampler's Tumnus was one of the first transparent overdrive Klon 'klones', and remains one of the best.

EFFECTS
DUNLOP CRY BABY WAH

One of the most commonly found effects on the 'boards of blues purists. Wherever you need a workhorse do-it-all wah, use a Cry Baby!

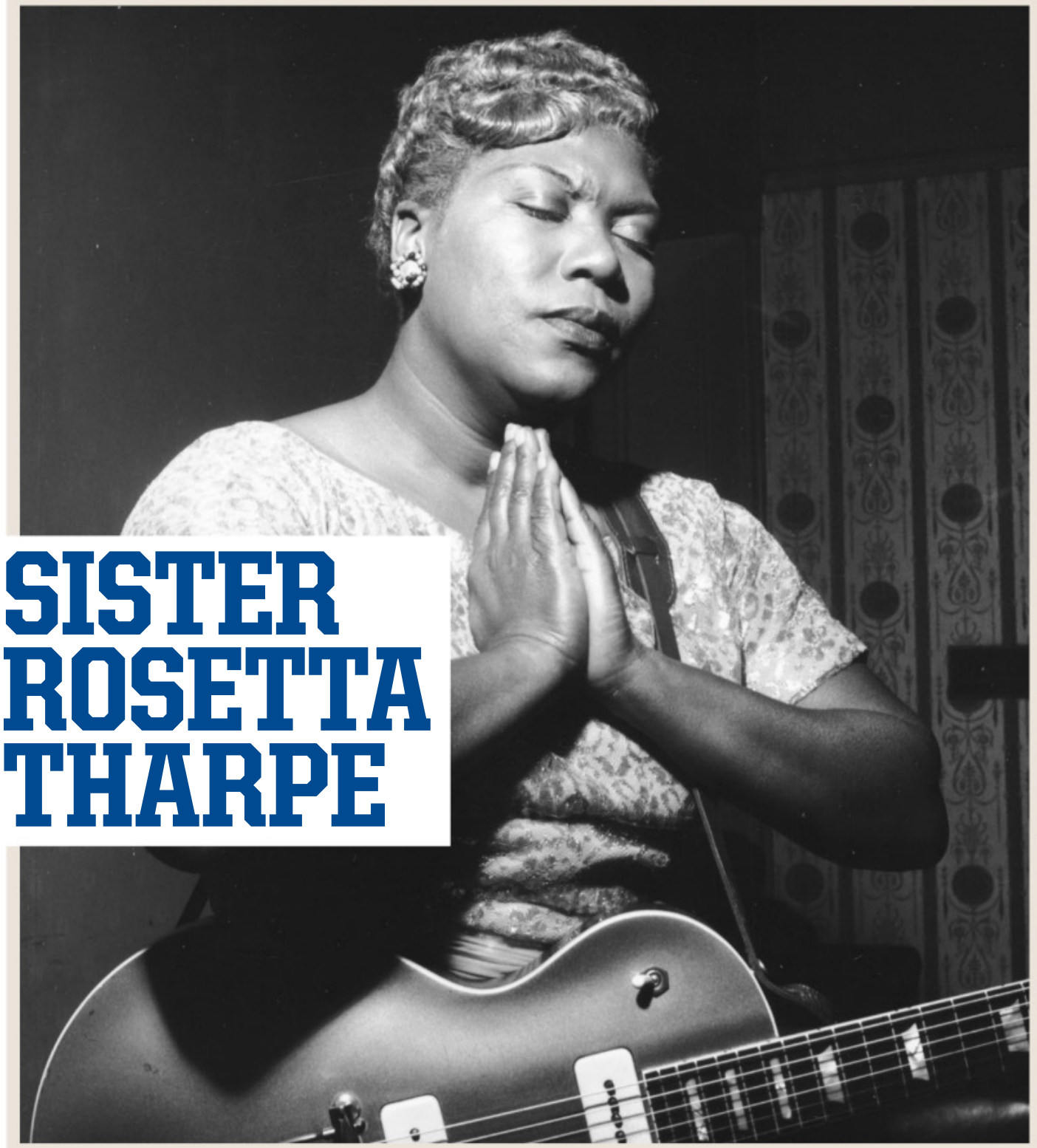
KEELEY VIBE-O-VERB

A UniVibe-style phaser and a reverb in one pedal. Great for soft shimmery echoes and wobbly modulation.

MXR CARBON COPY MINI DELAY

The pristine nature of digital repeats means that for blues you're better off with the darker analogue delay of this absolute workhorse.

THE GREATEST BLUES GUITARISTS OF ALL TIME



SISTER ROSETTA THARPE

Gospel singer turned blues guitar slinger dubbed the Godmother of rock 'n' roll

If you haven't seen the video of this American gospel singer wowing a stunned English audience on a disused Manchester railway station back in 1964, then Google it. Said to have influenced legends including Elvis Presley, Little Richard and Bob Dylan, Sister Rosetta lost many of her religious fans when she moved from gospel into blues, but gained a whole new following. Cracking out scary licks on a Gibson Les Paul Goldtop or white SG Custom in open E tuning, her distorted guitar lines matched her powerful, heartfelt vocals. A trailblazing electric guitarist and superb singer, her place in blues history is assured.

CHARLEY PATTON

The founder of delta blues

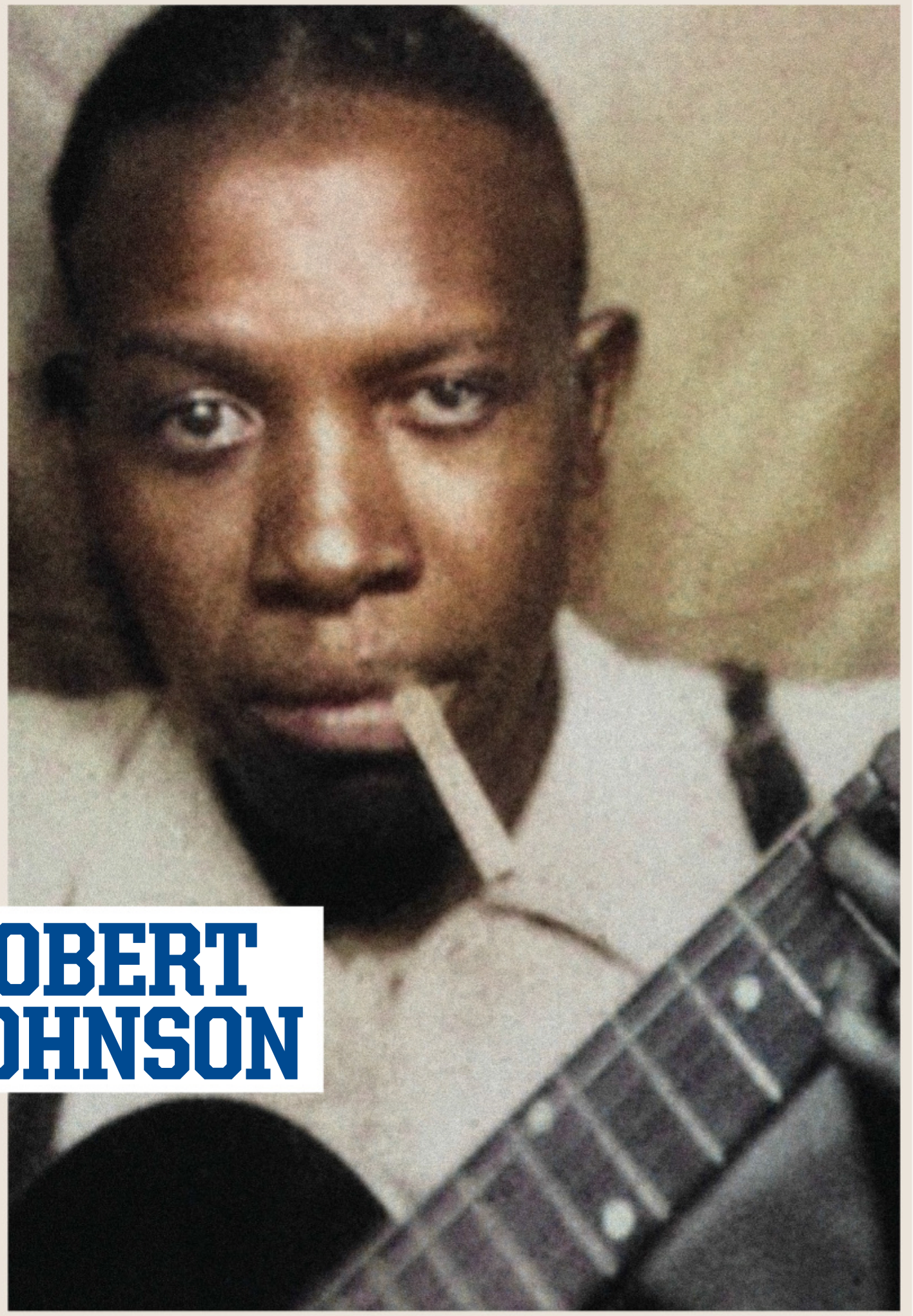
The 58 surviving songs we have from Mississippi resident Charley Patton come from just ten recording dates. Even with dodgy fidelity, they're a priceless document of the origins of delta blues, influencing everyone who came afterwards. Patton was among the first great blues showmen, performing with the guitar between his legs and behind his head thirty years before Chuck Berry. More importantly, his thumb slap technique was the precursor to modern slap bass. He tuned the guitar a tone sharp for his distinctive sound. Bob Dylan was a notable devotee, drawing much from Patton's folk ballads and observational lyrics.

SON HOUSE

***Preachin' Blues* was more than a song – it was his life story**

Robert Johnson may not have sold his soul to the devil, but Son House was captured by him. After years as a Baptist preacher hostile to secular music, he heard bottleneck slide for the first time, whereupon House bought a guitar and was soon found playing the blues in juke joints. Larkin Poe, Derek Trucks and Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac all covered his *Preachin' Blues*, while Johnny Winter and The White Stripes recorded takes on *Death Letter*. Rougher and rawer than his Delta contemporaries Charley Patton and Robert Johnson, his gutsy slide style converts well to electric blues-rock.

The mythic figure who shaped so much of the 20th Century's guitar music



ROBERT JOHNSON

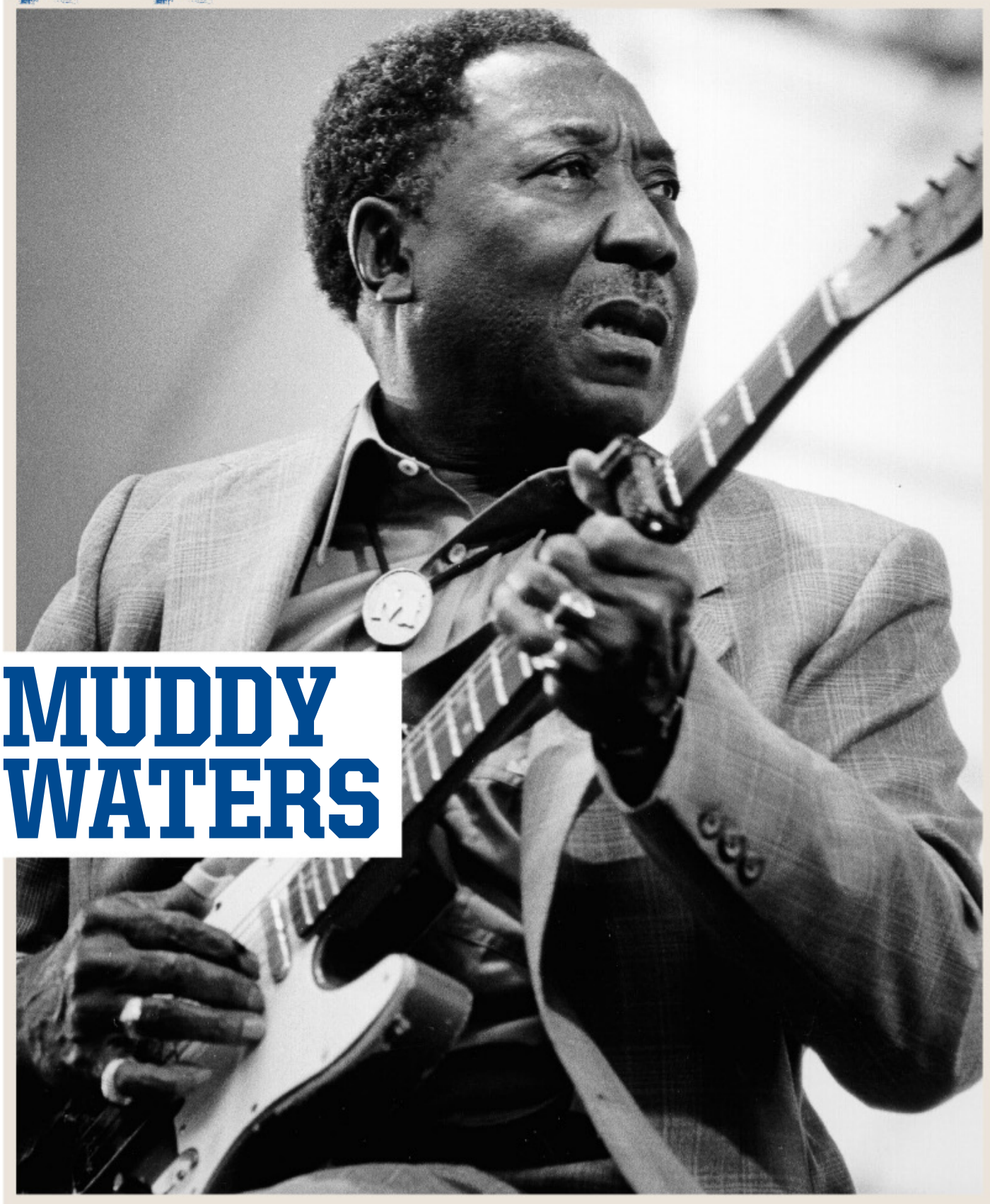
Arguably no musician has ever been the subject of such incredible mythology as Robert Johnson. Would rock 'n' roll ever have given us *Sympathy For The Devil* and *Highway To Hell* and if not for rumours of Johnson selling his soul at the crossroads? Would metal fans be scrawling pentagrams on guitars and throwing the horns if Johnson hadn't sung *Me And The Devil Blues?*

Beyond the incredible imagery, there's a sophistication and variety to Johnson and his delta contemporaries that modern blues often lacks. The art form is often reduced to endless 12-bars, while Johnson's own work embraced jazz and country. His blues compositions did not limit themselves to the 12-bar format, and his debut recording, *They're Red Hot*, was an uptempo ragtime number. Playing unaccompanied allowed Johnson and his contemporaries the freedom to play with time and tempo, and his songs have odd-length bars in unexpected places. With his singing and slide playing, he even explored microtonality in subtle ways that Jeff Beck and Derek Trucks are showered with praise for achieving today.

Musical immortality is mostly about having great songs. Beyond the legend, Johnson's name still looms so large because he wrote tunes that slap. *Dust My Broom*, *Crossroad Blues* and *Sweet Home Chicago* are the blues's biggest standards. The Rolling Stones covered *Love In Vain* and *Stop Breaking Down*, Led Zeppelin had *Traveling Riverside Blues* and *The Lemon Song*, while Steve Miller and Duane Allman both took a bite at *Come On In My Kitchen*. Guitarists like Ike Turner and Chuck Berry evolved Johnson's template into rock 'n' roll, and from that came a slew of hits.

It's not quite right to give the credit solely to Johnson. Delta blues musicians shared their creativity with each other more freely than today's copyright-driven music industry. Johnson's music carries plenty of influence from his and forebears and peers, some of whom are now forgotten. Johnson might be the most important musician in the development of 20th Century popular music, but he's also emblematic of dozens of black folk musicians who developed the genre without the pay or credit they deserved. Still, if you want to learn acoustic blues fingerstyle, Johnson's turnarounds are still the benchmark. If you want to play slide, you'll need to learn his licks. And if you're writing songs, you can only hope to capture an element of the human experience so profoundly as he did.

Photo Getty x3, Robert Johnson: Alamy



MUDDY WATERS

So powerful, he scared Hendrix

Six-time Grammy winner McKinley Morganfield ruled the Chicago blues scene from the mid 1940s on. Moving from Clarksdale, Mississippi in 1941 and switching from acoustic to electric guitar two years later, Morganfield (now Muddy Waters) assembled a band of the finest players in town, including Little Walter (harmonica), Otis Spann (piano) and Jimmy Rogers (guitar). Live, Muddy's band was a powerhouse. Jimi Hendrix found it terrifying – "I first heard him as a little boy and it scared me to death," quipped Jimi, who took a famous Muddy lick and turned it into *Voodoo Chile*. Muddy's playing was almost primeval.

Bluesman John P Hammond stated, "Muddy was the master of just the right notes; profound, deep and simple." Although he wrote songs, he is mainly remembered for covers that became the definitive versions, such as *Rolling Stone* (from which both magazine and band took their name), *Got My Mojo Working*, *Mannish Boy*, and *Hoochie Coochie Man*. Muddy was rarely seen without his red Fender Telecaster, on which he mostly played slide and the occasional riff, but his legend and musical influence remain almost unequalled. As BB King put it, "It's going to be years before people realise how great his contribution was to American music."

LEAD BELLY

The King of the 12-String

Born Huddie William Ledbetter in 1888, Lead Belly led a roaming life, picking up hundreds of songs from the oral folk traditions of the Deep South. He was a proficient multi-instrumentalist, but his primary instrument was the 12-string acoustic guitar. A posthumously released collection of prison ballads recorded in the 1930s immortalised his status with its title: *King Of The Twelve-String Guitar*. He played a 1920s jumbo-bodied, flat-topped Stella Auditorium with an extra long scale length, measuring 26.5 inches, which he would commonly tune down to B or C Standard to give his guitar its characteristically deep tonality.

Renowned not only for his musical skill, Lead Belly had an infamous predilection for violence, and it was during a stint at Lousiana's Angola Prison Farm for attempted murder that he was "discovered" by musicologists John and Alan Lomax, who were recording folk songs for the Library of Congress. The pair campaigned for his release in 1934 and recorded his classic tracks Midnight Special, Goodnight, Irene and many more.

Following his death in December 1949, Lead Belly left behind an immense body of work that directly inspired Britain's skiffle movement. George Harrison, a 12-string master himself, once said: "No Lead Belly, no Lonnie Donegan. Therefore no Lead Belly, no Beatles." Moreover, Lead Belly's influence has continued into the modern era, with Nirvana and Jack White among those who have covered his songs.

Photos Getty

T-BONE WALKER

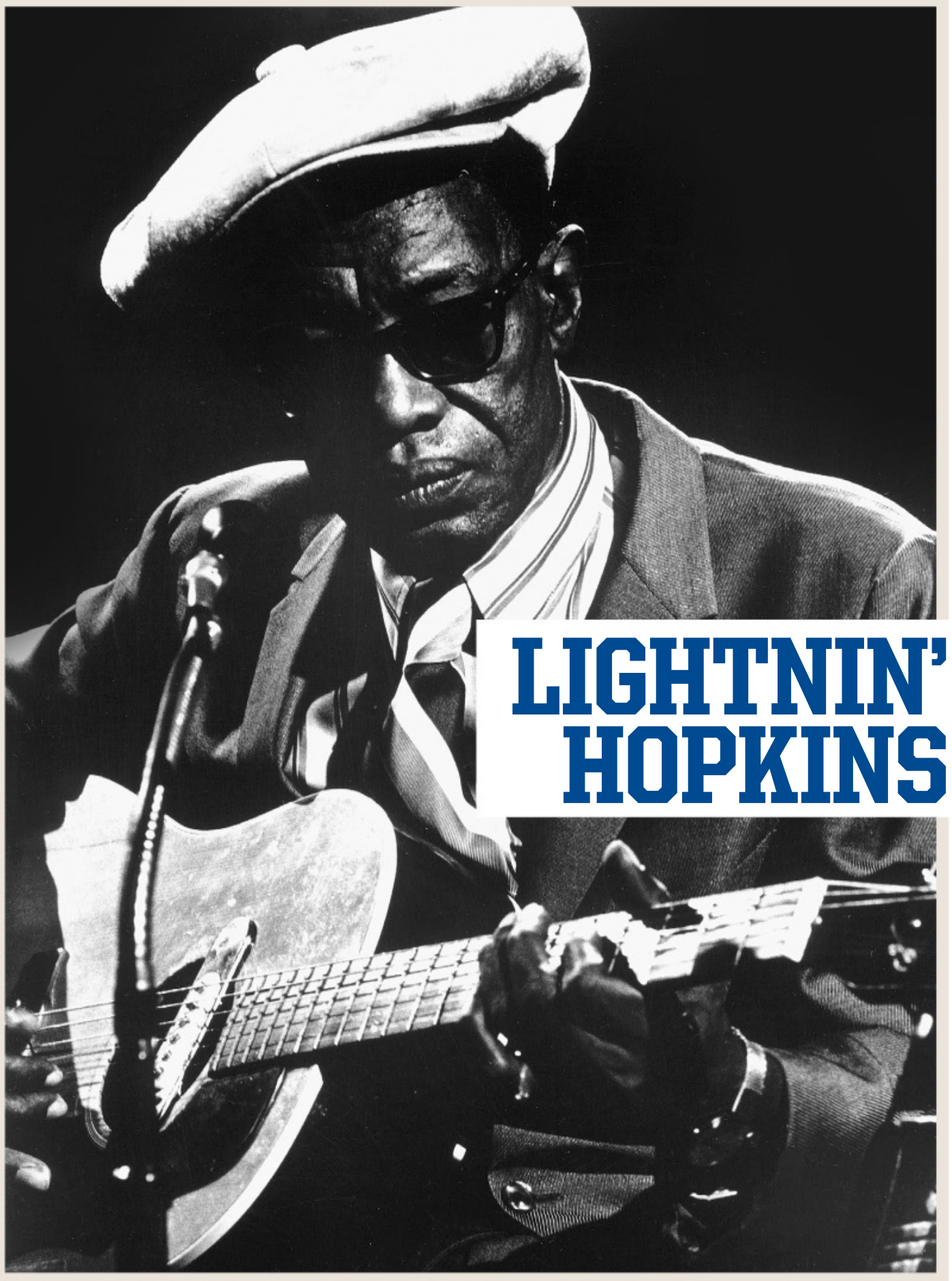
The man who invented electric blues guitar playing as we know it

Some blues pundits have opined that Aaron Thibeaux 'T-Bone' Walker laid down the template of pentatonic fretboard shapes that blues guitarists have followed ever since. A huge influence on B.B. King, Walker played mellow, swinging lines and jazzy chords on his hollow-bodied Gibson ES-250. On stage, however, he became the supreme showman, playing the guitar behind his head and doing the 'duck walk' which Chuck Berry copied (along with many of T-Bone's licks). Hugely musical, Walker studied with the same teacher as jazz guitar innovator Charlie Christian, both of whom spearheaded new, electric forms of their respective genres.

JOHN LEE HOOKER

As low down and dirty as the blues can get

This son of a Mississippi sharecropper had a musical style that was all his own. Usually playing an Epiphone Emperor while sitting down, Hooker drove the music with simple, open-position licks. Hooker spat out songs with barely hidden innuendo about sex and other basic desires like alcohol and money. Hooker never much cared for time signatures and his band often had to guess when he was changing chords. But if anything this added to his unquestionable authenticity. A true blues giant!



LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS

A bolt of blues genius from the heart of Texas

Samuel John 'Lightnin" Hopkins went from humble beginnings (he constructed his first guitar from a cigar G box, scraps of wood and wire) to become one of the most influential blues guitarists ever. Informed by Blind Lemon Jefferson and hours spent playing without a backing band, Hopkins developed a self-accompanying fingerstyle technique which involved playing bass, rhythm, lead and percussive parts simultaneously. He elevated the 12-bar blues template with his penchant for improvising, elongating the stretches between changes and spinning loose, imaginative licks on his Gibson J-50, which he had fitted with a DeArmond soundhole pickup. His influence would he heard in artists such as Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix.

ELMORE JAMES

King of the blues slide guitar

You might know songs like *The Sky Is Crying*, *Shake Your Moneymaker*, *Dust My Blues* and *Bleeding Heart* by Stevie Ray Vaughan, Fleetwood Mac, John Mayall and Jimi Hendrix. But all these and many more were written and originally performed by this fabulous singer and slide guitarist. Elmore's version of *It Hurts Me Too* is perhaps *the* definitive slow 12-bar blues, with its plaintive slide guitar motif and high, moaning vocal. James is also responsible for popularising the 'diddly-diddly-diddly-diddly-dee-dum' slide intro as heard on *Dust My Broom* and many others. It became Elmore's signature, but he was about much more than that. He was one of the biggest influences on the 60s blues revival in both America and the UK, and songs performed by James were relished by bands on both sides of the Atlantic. Guitarists including Jimi Hendrix, Brian Jones (The Rolling Stones), John Mayall, Jeremy Spencer (Fleetwood Mac) and even Frank Zappa mentioned him as an influence. As with so many blues greats it was never all about the guitar with Elmore; instrument and voice played vital roles in delivering his music, and James connected to his audience with both in equal measure. One of the greatest unsung bluesmen ever? We think so.

HOWLIN' WOLF

The big bad sound of Chicago blues

Howlin' Wolf was born Chester Arthur Burnett on 10 June 1910 in White Station, Mississippi. His parents named him after the 21st president of the United States, Chester Alan Arthur, who had campaigned for the rights of slaves in New York City.

The young Wolf found a mentor in legendary Delta bluesman Charley Patton, before making a name for himself on the Mississippi scene. Although Wolf never matched Patton in terms of his intricate playing prowess – opting for a chunkier, more simplistic style – he became a wild, larger than life on stage presence, literally. Wolf stood at six feet, three inches tall and weighed almost 300 pounds, and he would often encourage female fans to 'ride' him around on stage, among other antics.

In 1951, his first single *Moanin' At Midnight* became a hit and Wolf headed north to Chicago at the invitation of record label boss, Leonard Chess. Here, alongside Muddy Waters (with whom Wolf sustained a long and heated rivalry), he helped transform the rugged acoustic Delta Blues style into an electrified and wholly modern, urban listening experience with releases such as *Killing Floor* and *Spoonful*. Wolf reached a whole new audience in the 1960s when The Rolling Stones championed his influence upon their sound.

The undisputed king of electric blues guitar

BB KING

BB King was pure class, from his exquisite licks to his heartfelt vocals. Brought up on a plantation in Itta Bena, Mississippi, he was born Riley B. King in 1925.

King attended various churches, attracted to the blues-tinged gospel songs they sang. His pastor taught him three chords before his plantation boss advanced him the money to buy his own guitar. King taught himself to play and by 1946 had moved to Memphis with his cousin, slide guitarist Bukka White. Before long he was playing on local radio and scored a residency at a West Memphis grill. King soon gained his own show, where he was dubbed 'Beale Street Blues Boy', shortened to 'Blues Boy' and then 'BB'.

At this time he was still playing acoustic guitar, but influenced by his hero T-Bone Walker, King moved to electric. He initially played a Gibson ES-150, then an ES-5 Switchmaster, even a Fender Esquire, before finding the instrument with which he will forever be associated, the Gibson ES-355 thinline.

King named his guitars 'Lucille', after a fight over a woman of that name caused a burning oil drum heater to overturn. King ran back into the blazing building to retrieve his beloved instrument, and christened it (and every subsequent guitar) in her honour.

Several elements make King's style unique. Prior to King, few guitarists used vibrato with such artistry, but he loved the fluttering sound of slide guitarists such as cousin Bukka White, and the powerful quiver created by blues harmonica player Little Walter. So he developed his own, by quickly rotating his finger while holding down a fretted note. It made his licks sound more vocal, and set him aside from others. Also, King considered his singing and playing equal partners in his success, so rarely played chords while he sang, instead devoting each moment to a sung or played line, thus heightening each one's intensity.

In his early years, King followed the five-shape fingerboard template laid down by T-Bone Walker and others, but before long discovered a fretboard position that suited him perfectly. We now call this 'the BB box'. Essentially 'shape 3' in the pentatonic scheme, King pivoted his first finger on the root note of the key, on the second string – in A this would be 10th fret. From here he could easily reach a 5th above (first string, 12th fret), find ♭5th and 4th one and two frets down, and 2nd, ♭3rd and 3rd on the second string, 12th, 13th and 15th frets respectively. One string down on the 11th fret was the major 6th, so all these important notes were easily available within one small area – and that's before we take into account King's incredible string bending.

When the white blues boom of the 1960s exploded, artists like Eric Clapton, The Rolling Stones, and Paul Butterfield used their success to champion their own heroes. Thus artists like King, who had previously been dubbed "race" acts, gained the mainstream appreciation that they rightly deserved.

Photos Getty

Words Jenna Scaramanga

A MAN AND THE BLUES

Buddy Guy is last of the electric blues pioneers. TG profiles an extraordinary career in five key songs...

Still recording and performing at the age of 86, Buddy Guy has lived the archetypal blues story. His first job was picking cotton in Louisiana before he moved to Chicago at 21. He didn't expect to become a star; he just wanted to live somewhere he could see the greats play. After starving for several months, he lucked into jamming with Otis Rush at the 708 club, where Guy caused such a stir that the owner phoned Muddy Waters to come and watch. With Waters' patronage, Guy quickly landed a record deal, but his early recordings were watered down, without the distortion and feedback he used live. "I told [label boss] Leonard Chess we should get that sound on record," he recalled later. "He just told me, 'Ain't nobody gonna buy that noise, man!'"

Jeff Beck and Eric Clapton did buy that noise, however, and a young Jimi Hendrix once cancelled a show to watch Buddy Guy instead. A spectacular showman, Buddy used his 150 foot cable to begin gigs outside the venue and leap into the crowd. His new album *The Blues Don't Lie* shows Buddy as the last and greatest of the electric blues pioneers. "I promised them all," he remembers, "BB King, Muddy, Sonny Boy – as long as I'm alive, I'm going to keep the blues alive."

1 SIT AND CRY

From The Blues *(1958)*

Buddy arrived in Chicago with a Les Paul Goldtop. Two days before his first recording session, though, the guitar was stolen, changing the course of guitar history. A desperate Guy borrowed $160 from a club owner to buy a Stratocaster, which he used on this, his debut single. The all-star band also included Willie Dixon on bass, second guitarist Otis Rush, and future Chuck Berry sideman Odie Payne on drums. Although the tone is cleaner and more controlled than Guy would have preferred, his lead style was already well developed. At 2:17 there's a turnaround lick that Stevie Ray Vaughan clearly borrowed, and Guy's approach undoubtedly informed Vaughan's version of *Texas Flood*. The riffs to this song and Larry Davis' original *Texas Flood*, released the same year, are similar but Vaughan's lead fills sound more like Guy than Davis. Compared to the likes of BB King, Guy is noticeably busier. The licks between vocal lines have a tumbling quality, tripping over themselves with rhythmic variations. "Didn't mind jammin' notes together in a way that wasn't proper," Buddy wrote later. "Notes crashing into each other was another way to get attention. I learned how to ride high on electricity." The electricity was toned down for the studio, but the notes still crashed into each other.

2 MARY HAD A LITTLE LAMB

From A Man And The Blues *(1968)*

A reworking of a nursery rhyme is an unpromising premise for a blues classic, but Guy's stonking riff and acrobatic vocals made it a triumph. The way his syncopated chord stabs bounce off the horns shows his time as a session musician at Chess Records had paid off. There's still no sign of the howling distortion he could conjure live, but his Strat sounds big, punchy and clear – there's no sign of the weedy or shrill tones that lesser players can suffer from. A clean amp at that volume is an unforgiving beast, but Guy delivers his licks with authority.

Stevie Ray Vaughan covered this version faithfully on his debut album, even using the same opening lick on his solo. Vaughan, though, sticks to the minor pentatonic, while Guy ventures out into the major at points. This album, *A Man And The Blues*, combined Guy's blues styles with soul much as Albert King had done on *Born Under A Bad Sign*, and the insistent Motown drum pattern and horn arrangement make this a jubilant blues performance.

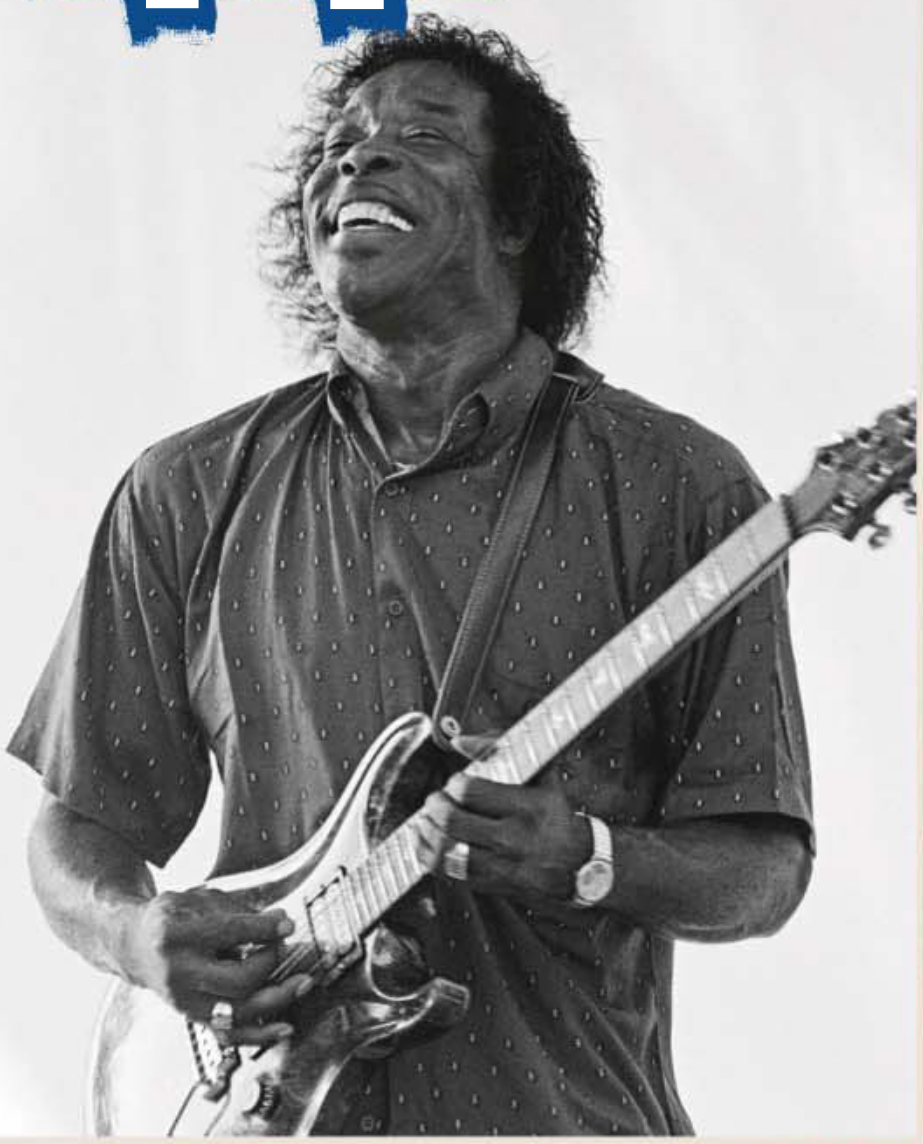
3 ONE ROOM COUNTRY SHACK

From Live In Montreux *(1978)*

The live album with Junior Wells, *Live In Montreux* (re-released in 1999 as *Everything Gonna Be Alright*) finds Guild-era Guy delivering humbucker-fuelled madness. He throws the kitchen sink at this opening cut, showing that whatever can be said for BB King's 'less is more' philosophy, more can also be more. The licks cascade into each other like someone talking too excitedly to pause for breath, but there's an art to the chaos. At the end of his intro solo, around 1:23, Guy plays a perfectly executed turnaround, a constant stream of notes that nevertheless beautifully highlight the changes underneath. You could listen to the isolated guitar line and still know exactly what chords he's playing over just from the guitar melody.

Back in the 60s, Guy had been among the first to spot to the potential of an overdriven amp. "When I heard the buzzin' and the fuzz tones distorting the amps, that didn't bother me none," he wrote in his autobiography. "I figured fuzz tones and distortion added to the excitement of the sound." Live recordings are the only place to hear the vintage Guy with a cooking amp, and here he balances it perfectly on the edge of clarity and sustain.

Photo Getty



GUITAR TALKIN' Guy live in Central Park, New York, June 1990.

4 DAMN RIGHT, I'VE GOT THE BLUES

From Damn Right, I've Got The Blues *(1991)*

While the guitarists he influenced became stars, Buddy spent the 70s and 80s in the wilderness, with no record deal in his home country and a relentless gigging schedule. After a performance with Eric Clapton at the Albert Hall, though, Guy was introduced to Silvertone Records boss Andrew Lauder. Signing immediately, Lauder brought in Roxy Music's John Porter to produce, and Guy was finally happy with the sound. "John worked hard to let me sound the way I sound live," said Buddy in his autobiography. "What you hear is a man used to wearing handcuffs flying free as a bird."

Guy's Strat tone was dirty yet clear. Guy had pioneered lodging the 3-way switch on his 1958 Strat between positions to get combinations of pickups, and it's those in-between sounds that predominate here. *Damn Right* became the biggest hit of Guy's career, bolstered by guest appearances on the album from Jeff Beck, Eric Clapton and Mark Knopfler. Still, on hearing Guy's potential finally captured on tape it's hard to ignore the missed opportunity. It's a great blues album, but its impact is lessened because it came after *Wheels Of Fire*, *Are You Experienced* and *Texas Flood*. It could and should have been made 30 years earlier, when it would have been truly revolutionary.

5 LET MY GUITAR DO THE TALKING

From The Blues Don't Lie *(2022)*

Released exactly 65 years since he first arrived in Chicago, 2022's *The Blues Don't Lie* arrives with Buddy receiving something like the recognition he deserves: multiple Grammy Awards, induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, and a queue of star collaborators. But on this album opener, Guy takes care of business on his own. Hearing his wah-soaked Strat, it's hard to avoid thinking of Hendrix, but as we've discussed, that comparison is back-to-front. The frenetic tremolo picking and scorching double-string bends show the octogenarian Guy hasn't lost a step, and the scorching tone is among the best he's ever recorded.

Elsewhere on the album, Jason Isbell, James Taylor, and Mavis Staples feature. In many ways, Guy's 21st Century resurgence is similar to the latter stages of Johnny Cash's career: after decades in obscurity, a 1960s legend is revived through collaborations with new talent, all of whom were influenced by the original 60s material. Where Cash's voice grew hauntingly fragile with age, though, Guy's guitar and voice have an intensity that show little sign of waning.

"I FIGURED FUZZ TONES AND DISTORTION ADDED TO THE EXCITEMENT OF THE SOUND"

Buddy Guy

WISE GUY

What Buddy has learned – in his own words

PICKING

"No one ever sat me down and showed me how to play anything, even how to hold a pick. Until BB King told me to get a straight pick, I was just playing with my fingers. In fact, I still do, using my fingers and the pick. A lot of the time I just put the pick in the palm of my hand and then swap back and forth, but I don't know how I do it!"

VOLUME

"When I started recording at Chess, Willie Dixon told me to turn it down; [he] said I was too loud. Then they all heard Cream and Hendrix and saw how many albums they were selling, and decided that perhaps it wasn't such a bad thing after all!"

SLIDE

"I always wanted to play slide. I used to see this guy called Earl Hooker [John Lee Hooker's cousin] who played the best slide I've ever heard. I had a bottleneck but I actually gave it to him because he was so good that I felt embarrassed trying!"

GUITAR ABUSE

"The Guild that I got given back in 1967 was the first endorsement that I had; I never thought that anyone would give me a guitar, but I always loved Stratocasters. I was wild and crazy. I used to throw it down on the floor – something I couldn't do with the Guild – and one time in 1969 it flew off the top of the car I was travelling in. But apart from a few scratches it was fine!"

LIVING THE BLUES

"The cognac they make in France has to stay in the bottle for 100 years before they put it out there. I guess you could look at a blues guitar player the same way. So if you don't have the blues yet, just keep living!"

Photo Getty

GUY'S GUITARS

The gear that gave Buddy his signature sound

1958 FENDER STRATOCASTER

Buddy's first Strat, bought new in 1958 for $159, has the very rare combination of a 3-tone sunburst body with one-piece maple neck. He used it almost exclusively until it was stolen on the road in the 70s. Guy superfan Bobby DeVito sold it back to him in 1995.

1959 FENDER BASSMAN

The tweed Bassman was just for bass until Buddy discovered its magic for guitar. He runs everything on 10 except the bass at around 2 o'clock, and controls everything from the guitar. With no overdrive pedal, all his distortion comes from pushing the amp. He now uses a replica with a cabinet built from the oak countertop of a local store in his hometown of Lettsworth, Louisiana.

BUDDY GUY SIGNATURE WAH

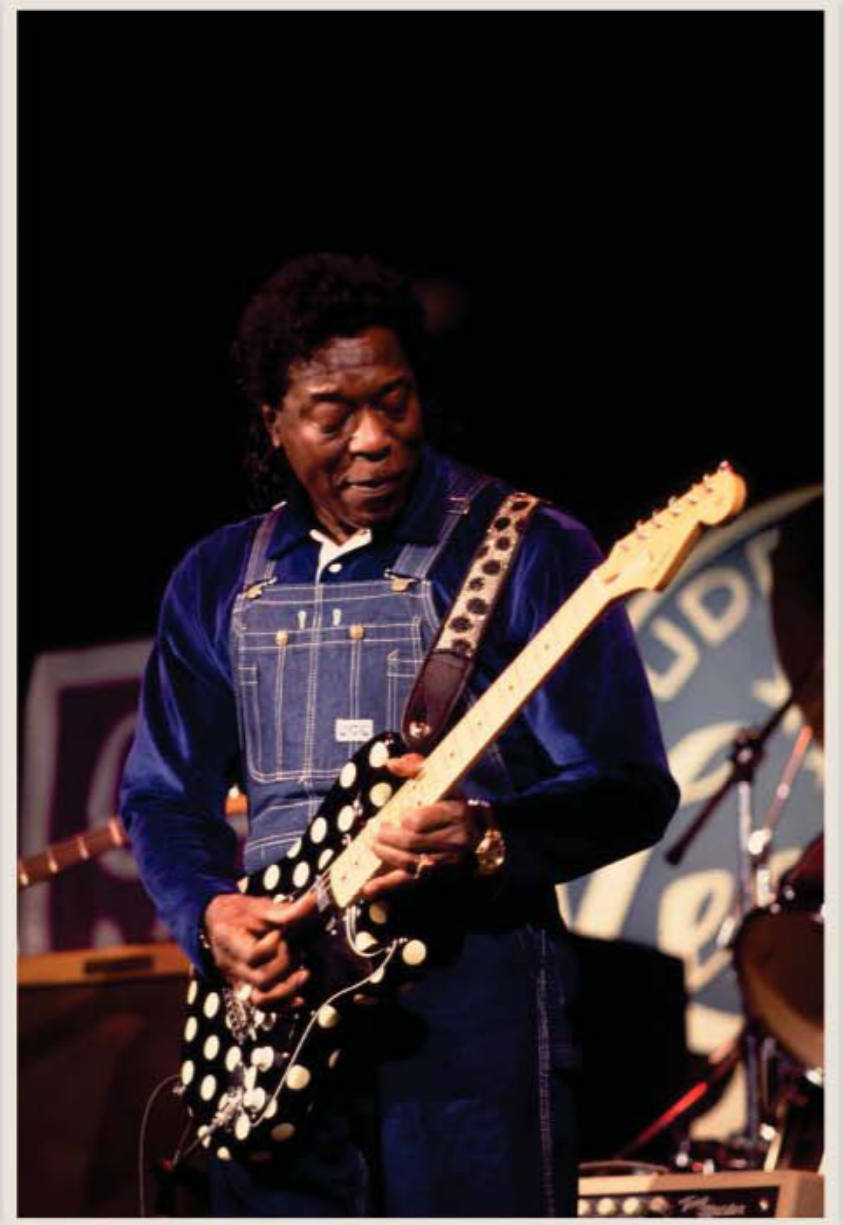
Decorated by Dunlop in Guy's signature polka dot design, the wah is the only pedal in Buddy's rig. Of its two modes, 'deep' and 'BG', the latter is the singing Buddy Guy sound.

GUILD STARFIRE IV

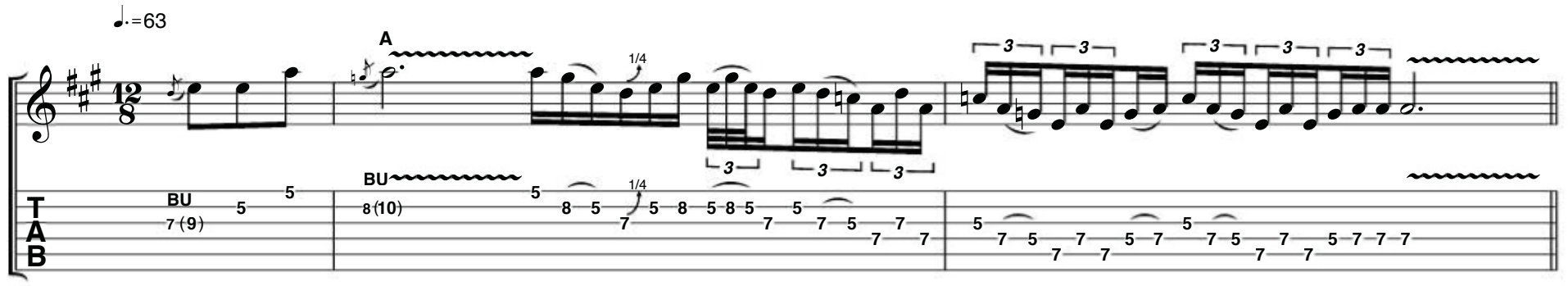
Buddy was a Guild endorsee through the 70s and 80s. He'd always been a fan of semi-acoustics thanks to BB King, and the hollow construction fed his feedback addiction. Hear it on his *Live In Montreux* album with Junior Wells. He only went back to Strats because they were more robust for touring.

1989 FENDER CUSTOM SHOP STRAT

The first Buddy Guy signature Strats were based on the Clapton models after Buddy borrowed Eric's guitar and liked the tone from the Lace Sensor pickups and active mid boost. His blonde 1989 one, now with Vintage Noiseless pickups, is his main touring axe.

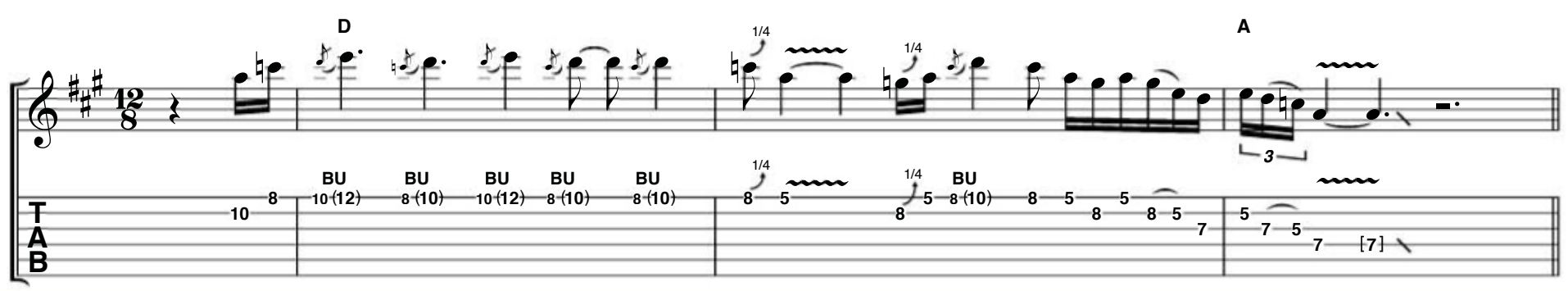


TRIPLING THE BLUES — BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO

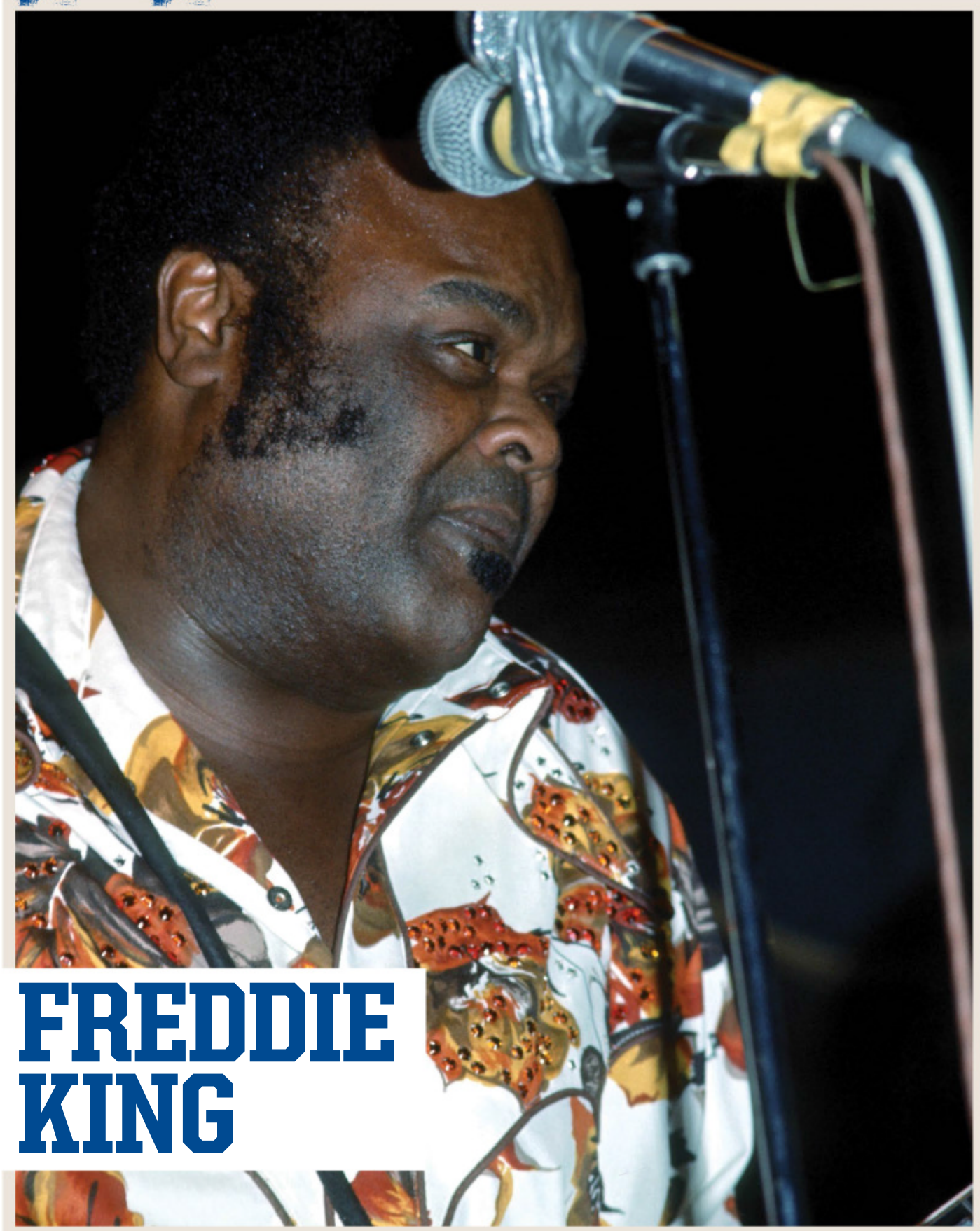


At first glance, nobody would blame you for being concerned at all those 16th-note triplets, but if you work through this lick slowly you'll see that it stays within the A minor pentatonic scale (A C D E G) without any unpredictable jumps. Think of it as a highly embellished but loose blues run rather than a super-accurate shred lick.

BEND IT LIKE BUDDY — BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO



After the two pickup notes, bar 1 is all about getting the most out of those bends. If you happen to catch the second string too, so much the better – this is definitely not about being neat and tidy, and it'll give you a nice bluesy dissonant clash. The second half should fall into place if you've spent some time on our previous lick



FREDDIE KING

The Texas Cannonball – the meanest picker in town!

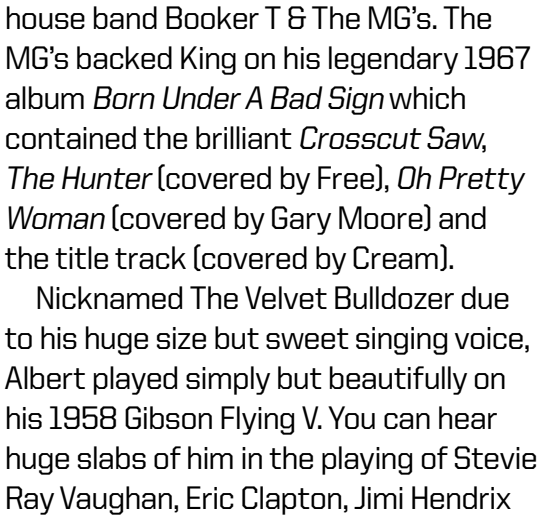
Of the legendary 'Three Kings', Freddie was the youngest and most raucous. His guitar style was fast and ferocious, with huge string bends and vicious vibrato, his vocals almost guttural in their delivery.

Born in Gilmer, Texas in 1934, Freddie learned guitar from age six, but moved to Chicago while in his teens. Freddie would sneak into the blues clubs and watch legends like Muddy Waters, Elmore James and T-Bone Walker. He took onboard their stagecraft, marvelled at their musicianship and determined to make it big, just like them. But after continual rejection by Chess Records on Chicago's South Side he finally struck a deal with Federal Records on the city's West Side, where a hipper blues scene was burgeoning. Freddie became a hit in the clubs here, and his first single for Federal would become a standard – *Have You Ever Loved A Woman*, later a staple in Eric Clapton's career.

Freddie influenced a raft of later white guitarists, like Clapton, Peter Green, Michael Bloomfield and Stevie Ray Vaughan. His instrumentals became legendary – *Hide Away*, *The Stumble* and *San-Ho-Zay*, among others – and he will also be remembered for having one of the first mixed race bands. Freddie was hard working and hard living, and died of pancreatitis, aged just 42.

ALBERT KING

The Velvet Bulldozer, a literal giant of the blues



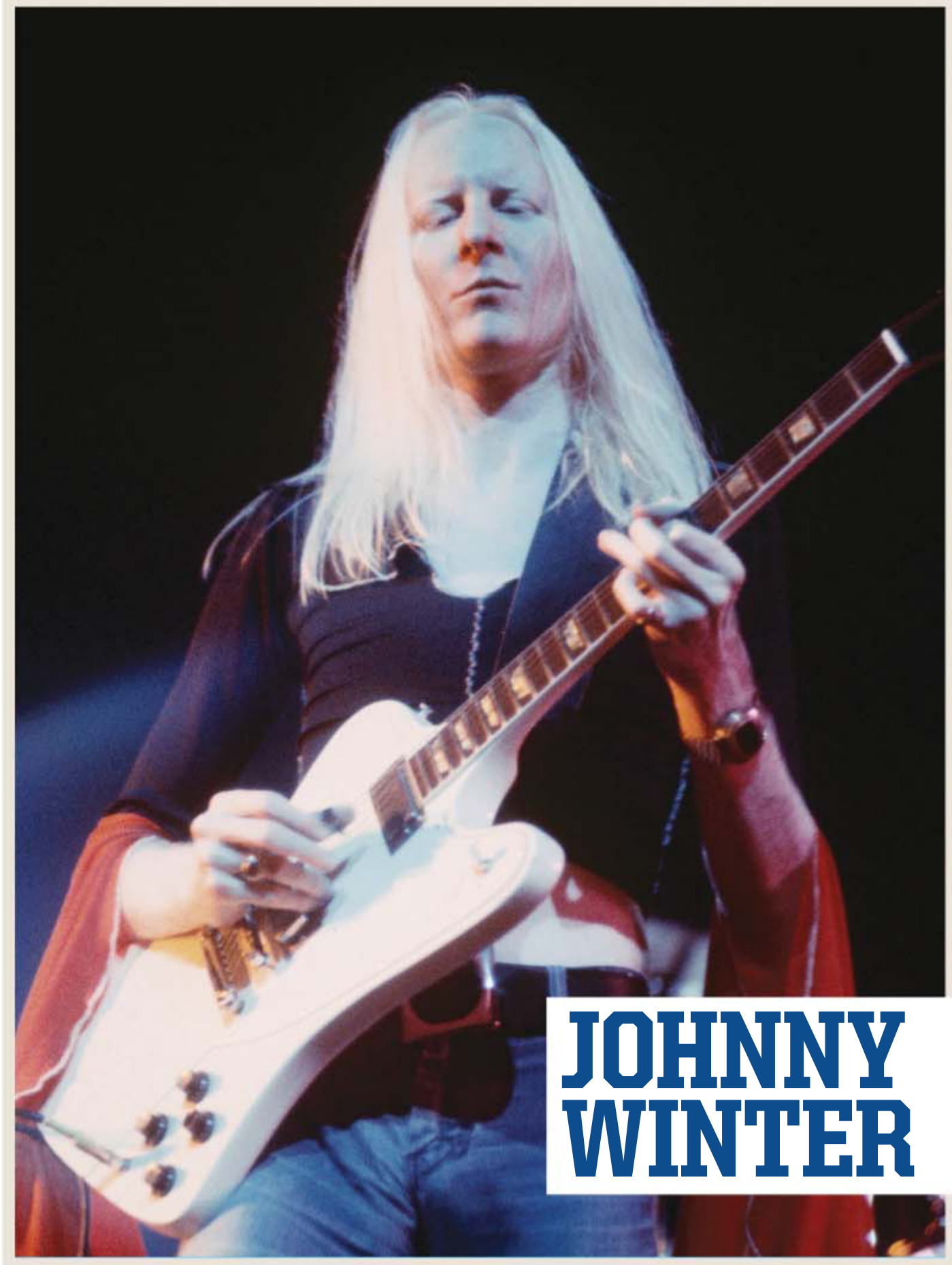
Born Albert Nelson in 1923, Albert King stood 6' 4" and weighed 250lbs. Like BB (no relation, although Albert often fudged the reality), was born on and worked on a cotton plantation in Indianola, Texas.

King fashioned his first guitar from a cigar box, with a tree branch neck and strung it with a strand of broom wire. When he finally got a guitar, being left-handed he simply turned the right-hander upside down and played with the strings reversed. He also tuned very loosely – Gary Moore told *Guitarist* magazine that while working with King he took a sneaky peak and found it to be C♯ F♯ B E G♯ C♯.

This down-stringing made his action very pliable. Albert could play a whole lick by bending his top string by a 4th and letting it down to create other intervals.

After various attempts at a record deal he moved to Memphis and was signed by soul label Stax, with superb house band Booker T & The MG's. The MG's backed King on his legendary 1967 album *Born Under A Bad Sign* which contained the brilliant *Crosscut Saw*, *The Hunter* (covered by Free), *Oh Pretty Woman* (covered by Gary Moore) and the title track (covered by Cream).

Nicknamed The Velvet Bulldozer due to his huge size but sweet singing voice, Albert played simply but beautifully on his 1958 Gibson Flying V. You can hear huge slabs of him in the playing of Stevie Ray Vaughan, Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix and Joe Walsh among others.



JOHNNY WINTER

The Texan whose Firebird lit up blues-rock with thumbpickin' heat

There was always something otherworldly about Johnny Winter, as though he had one foot in this life and one in the next. The rake-thin Texan with the long blond hair and Gibson Firebird was all angles. And his style was all action, all attitude. He had the voice to match, too. Winter approached the electric guitar differently to most blues players, preferring a thumb pick and applying a country-esque, Chet Atkins-style approach to blues-rock, and would glean insight not just from blues guitar practitioners but from mouth organ licks, expanding his vocabulary on the guitar, and taking blues-rock forward.

Winter started out young, and his big break arrived in 1968 when Mike Bloomfield invited him to play with him at New York City's Fillmore East, where the suits from Columbia Records were in attendance and could not help but notice Winter's capacity for showmanship on a performance of BB King's *It's My Own Fault*. They signed him, offering winter a record $600,000 advance.

Winter's legacy was writ large on not just how he played the guitar but how he recorded it, having tracked a trio of Muddy Waters albums in the late 1970s, also playing some guitar as well as producing.

RORY GALLAGHER

The blues-rock powerhouse who gave the art form a Celtic flavour

Great blues players always have the whiff of legend about them. There's something about biographical apocrypha that ennobles their art, like the story that Gallagher played the first Fender Stratocaster ever sold in Ireland. It's quite possibly true – the esteemed Dave Hunter suggests as much in his book *Ultimate Star Guitars: The Guitars That Rocked The World.* But what really matters is how Gallagher played this 1961 model, and how he treated it. This was a guitar that looked like Gallagher sounded; a Sunburst relic'd raw by hard miles on the road.

He threw everything at it, powerchord riffs, saucing the pentatonic scale with notes from the minor scale, a fiery slide technique that ebbed and flowed and held the audience's emotions in its travel. Gallagher was similarly adept with an acoustic guitar. Check out the virtuosic *Just The Smile*, a track that brought Americana together with Celtic folk elements. Gallagher influenced everyone and anyone who heard him play. Most notably, his use of a Vox AC30 with a treblebooster in front inspired Brian May to do likewise. To follow in his footsteps is to similarly commit to high-volume tube amp tone and the temperament to bring it to heel.

Words Tim Tucker

HOW JIMI PLAYED THE BLUES

His mastery of the art in five landmark tracks

In the tradition of many itinerant bluesmen before him, Jimi Hendrix spent his formative years travelling around North America, from his upbringing in Vancouver and Seattle, down to the birthplace of the blues, the Deep South. "I was largely influenced by blues artists when I first started," he said, picking up inspiration from his father's record collection and other musicians. "The first guitarist I was aware of was Muddy Waters. I heard one of his old records when I was a little boy and it scared me to death. Wow, what is that all about?"

It was in the South, though, as a professional musician on the 'chitlin' circuit', that he developed his unique musical style, fused from a combination of Delta blues, R&B, rock 'n' roll and soul. He encountered many blues musicians on the way, including Albert King, who made a considerable impact on Hendrix's artistic development.

When his new manager Chas Chandler brought him to England, it was no surprise that the preeminent guitarists of the British Blues boom, including Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Brian Jones, considered him the real deal. He was immediately recognised as inspiration, competition, and a visionary pointing to the future of blues music.

And what a future that was: loud, sensitive, joyous, agonised and cosmic in its scope. The new blues sound Jimi forged was inspired by the electric performances of blues greats like Buddy Guy, channelled through the latest technology, including his Fuzzface distortion, Vox Wah pedal and 100 Watt Marshall stacks. It was a sound like nothing ever heard before.

Throughout his career, Hendrix incorporated all the blues guitar trademarks in his own inimitable style: simultaneous lead and rhythm playing, pentatonic licks, emotive trills, screeching solos and blistering shred-like runs. But more than anything, it was the feel of the blues that Hendrix inherited and passed on to a new generation.

As legendary blues guitarist John Lee Hooker said, quoted in the original CD booklet for the *Hendrix Blues* album: "He could play the hard blues. Anybody can put the clothes on, but everyone can't produce it. It's got to come from the soul. He was the greatest guitar player that was ever born. I can't say enough about him. He could play deep blues."

1 RED HOUSE

From Los Angeles Forum: April 26, 1969 *(2022)*

This Hendrix original first saw the light of day on the UK version of the Jimi Hendrix Experience's debut album, *Are You Experienced*. According to Hendrix it was excluded from the American release because he was told 'Americans don't like blues, man.' It was the first 12-bar blues of many that he would record, and immediately showcased his loose, effortless style, with notes, phrases and chords tumbling from his fingers. The song became a live favourite, prompting some of his longest onstage jams, very often going over ten minutes in length.

The version on the newly released *Los Angeles Forum* set was recorded during the band's last North American tour. Starting at a comfortable slow tempo, Jimi plays gentle arpeggios and sweet melodies on his 1968 Fender Stratocaster. The pace picks up in intensity, when Mitch Mitchell's drums thunder forward and Jimi pushes his futuristic fuzz and wah sound into the stratosphere. Later the band go into a jazz swing feel and Hendrix experiments with partial chord playing and funky scratching on muted strings, before returning with his sweet crying tone to see the song out.

2 VOODOO CHILE

From Electric Ladyland *(1968)*

Starting life as a version of the Muddy Waters-inspired *Catfish Blues*, this song was renamed by Hendrix after a review in *Rolling Stone* dubbed his last album 'the finest voodoo album that any rock group has ever produced.' There are plenty of legends about Hendrix's involvement with voodoo, including claims he developed his extraordinary guitar playing prowess after engaging in shamanic ceremonies in the Deep South blues scene, echoing legends of Robert Johnson's pact with the devil.

This early morning all-star jam session featured some of the best blues-inspired musicians of the rock scene, including Jack Cassady on bass and Traffic's Stevie Winwood on organ. Over 15 minutes of improvisation, Hendrix trades licks with Winwood, a blues master himself. The two virtuosos drive each other to greater heights, with Hendrix occasionally lifting off from planet Earth into another stratosphere through his soaring lead breaks. British writer Charles Shaar Murray called the performance 'a chronological guided tour of blues styles'. A day later it yielded *Voodoo Child (Slight Return)*, one of Hendrix's most enduringly popular recordings.

3 HEAR MY TRAIN A COMIN'

From Blues *(1994)*

This Hendrix original, which he often referred to as *Getting My Heart Back Together Again*, was recorded live and in the studio at various times, but never officially released during his lifetime. The opening track on the posthumous

Photo Getty

KIND OF BLUE
Jimi performing at the Royal Albert Hall in London in February 1969, two months before the LA Forum show was recorded.

Blues album features an acoustic version, recorded in December 1967 during a photo session for the filming of the documentary *Experience* (1968). The impromptu performance occurred when Hendrix picked up a nearby Zemaitis 12-string acoustic guitar, in standard C tuning, that happened to be strung for a left hander.

It's one of only two recorded examples of Hendrix's acoustic guitar playing, made all the more remarkable in that it's played on a 12-string acoustic. His dexterity with this unwieldy instrument provides a tantalising glimpse of what he could do with an acoustic, with triple time phrasing in the style of Tommy Johnson, and humming accompaniment in the John Lee Hooker style. The result is as close to authentic country blues as Hendrix got.

The final track on the Blues album is the definitive electric rendition of the same song, recorded live at the Berkeley Community Theatre in May 1970 with Billy Cox on bass and Mitch Mitchell on drums. The tempo is slow, the beat heavy, and Hendrix is at the height of his powers, commanding his classic 1968 white Stratocaster with alternating blues licks, chromatic runs and crying melodies.

4 KILLING FLOOR

From Live at Monterey *(1967)*

The moment Hendrix broke through in his homeland is captured on this recording of the legendary Monterey concert. Introduced by Brian Jones of The Rolling Stones as 'the most exciting guitar player I've ever heard', Hendrix appeared before an audience that barely knew him. By the end of his set, he'd pointed the way forward for blues rock.

Although The Who had played an explosive set earlier in the evening, they were followed by a relatively sedate forty minutes of psychedelic noodling by The Grateful Dead. So when Jimi kicked off with his take on the Howlin' Wolf blues classic *Killing Floor*, the audience was awakened to the presence of something entirely new. While white English musicians had been doing their best to reproduce the blues style of Chicago, Hendrix at once identified himself with its past, present and future: tripling the tempo, quadrupling the volume, before setting fire to it and birthing something completely fresh from its remains.

On this opening song of his set, Hendrix effortlessly shifts from rhythmic attack to throwaway licks and incendiary lead breaks, pushing his 1965/66 Black Fender Stratocaster way beyond its limits. Later on he switched to the hand-painted 1963/64 Strat for the shocking climax of his set, setting fire to his instrument and changing rock music forever.

5 CATFISH BLUES

From Blues *(1994)*

The Jimi Hendrix Experience recorded this blazing take of a traditional blues song in November 1967 at Vitus Studios, Bussem, Holland. This interpretation is inspired by Muddy Waters, starting with a slow, grinding groove, flamboyant trills and the sharp, abrasive riff, mixing in melody lines in unison with his vocal. At 2:25 he starts to take it in a new direction, with partial chords and screaming lead runs, before reigning it back in and dropping out for Mitch Mitchell's drum solo. At 5:25, Hendrix returns in full force, with his wah pedal and whammy bar providing fresh inspiration. At 6:30 he instigates a double-time gallop towards the song's incendiary finale, his guitar howling at full volume as it crashes to a close.

"JIMI COULD PLAY THE HARD BLUES. HE COULD PLAY DEEP BLUES"

John Lee Hooker

Photo Getty

JIMI'S GEAR

Jimi's blues gear could be quite different from his rock rigs

1951 EPIPHONE FT 79

Hendrix owned this for nearly three years, longer than any other guitar, picking it up in New York shortly after his Monterey Pop appearance. The unclear but footage is he appears to use it for a version of *Hound Dog* in one of only two known videos of him playing an acoustic.

1960S ZEMAITIS 12-STRING

The mesmerising acoustic performance of *Hear My Train A Comin'* that opens *Blues* employed this hand-built model by luthier Tony Zemaitis. It's tuned down to C standard for that Leadbelly-style recording. Little else is known about it, but some wood shavings purportedly from the guitar sold at auction for £90 in 2019.

DALLAS ARBITER FUZZ FACE

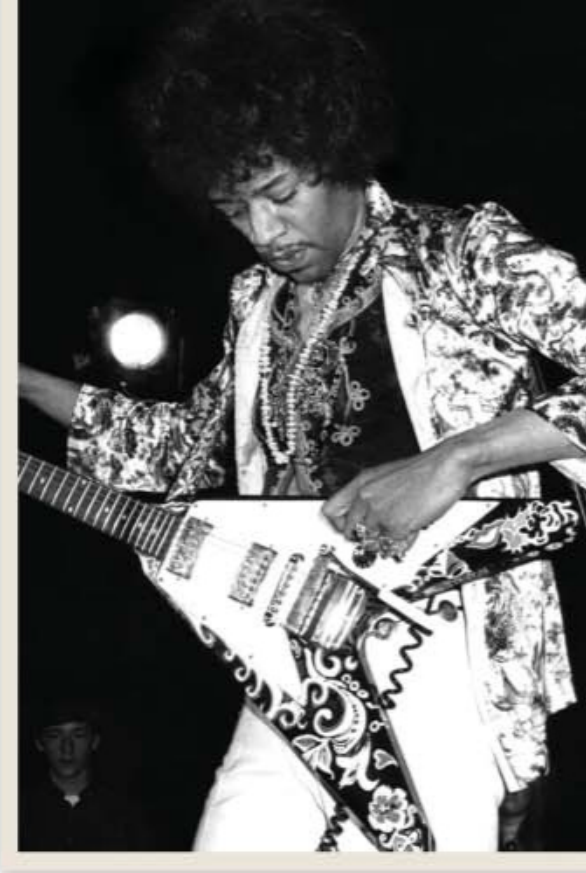
The secret of many of Jimi's sought after clean tones, such as the *Voodoo Chile* intro, is that he left his Fuzz Face on and rolled off his guitar volume. The Fuzz Face cleans up beautifully and adds a unique sparkle to the sound. Both germanium and silicon fuzzes work.

FENDER DUAL SHOWMAN

Multiple sources, including producer Eddie Kramer, agree Hendrix recorded with Fender amps, notably on *Voodoo Chile*. Sadly Kramer has told the same story about several amps, also mentioning Bassmans and Twins. The Dual Showman appeared on stage with Jimi though, notably at Monterey and on his 1968 US tour. Jimi's early Marshall JTM45s also used a modified Fender circuit.

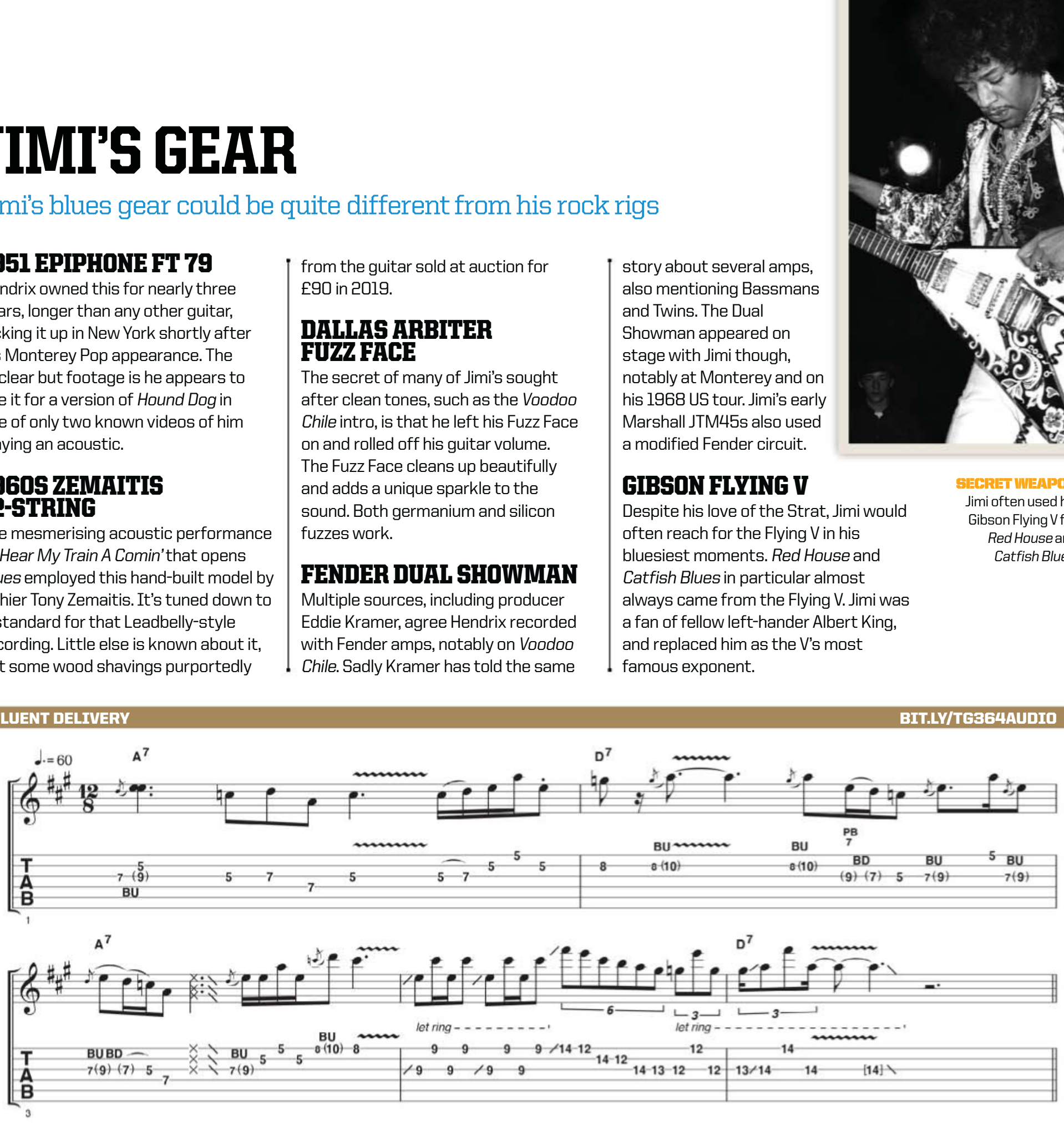
GIBSON FLYING V

Despite his love of the Strat, Jimi would often reach for the Flying V in his bluesiest moments. *Red House* and *Catfish Blues* in particular almost always came from the Flying V. Jimi was a fan of fellow left-hander Albert King, and replaced him as the V's most famous exponent.



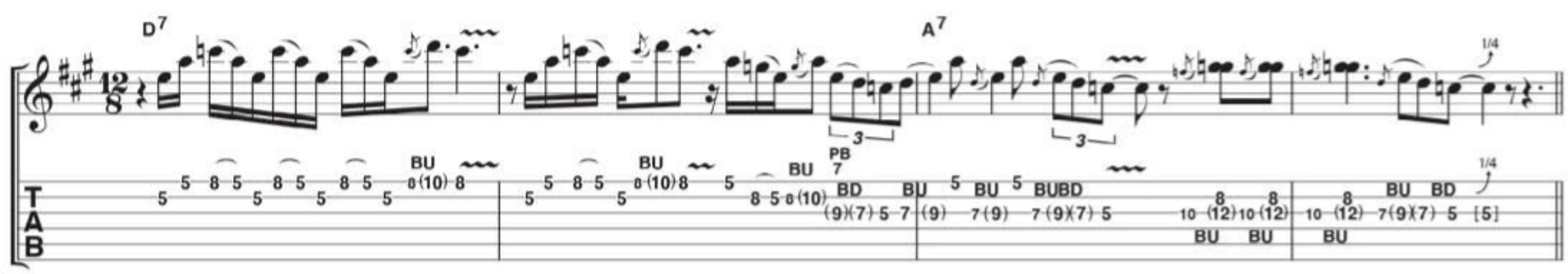
SECRET WEAPON
Jimi often used his Gibson Flying V for *Red House* and *Catfish Blues*.

FLUENT DELIVERY **BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO**



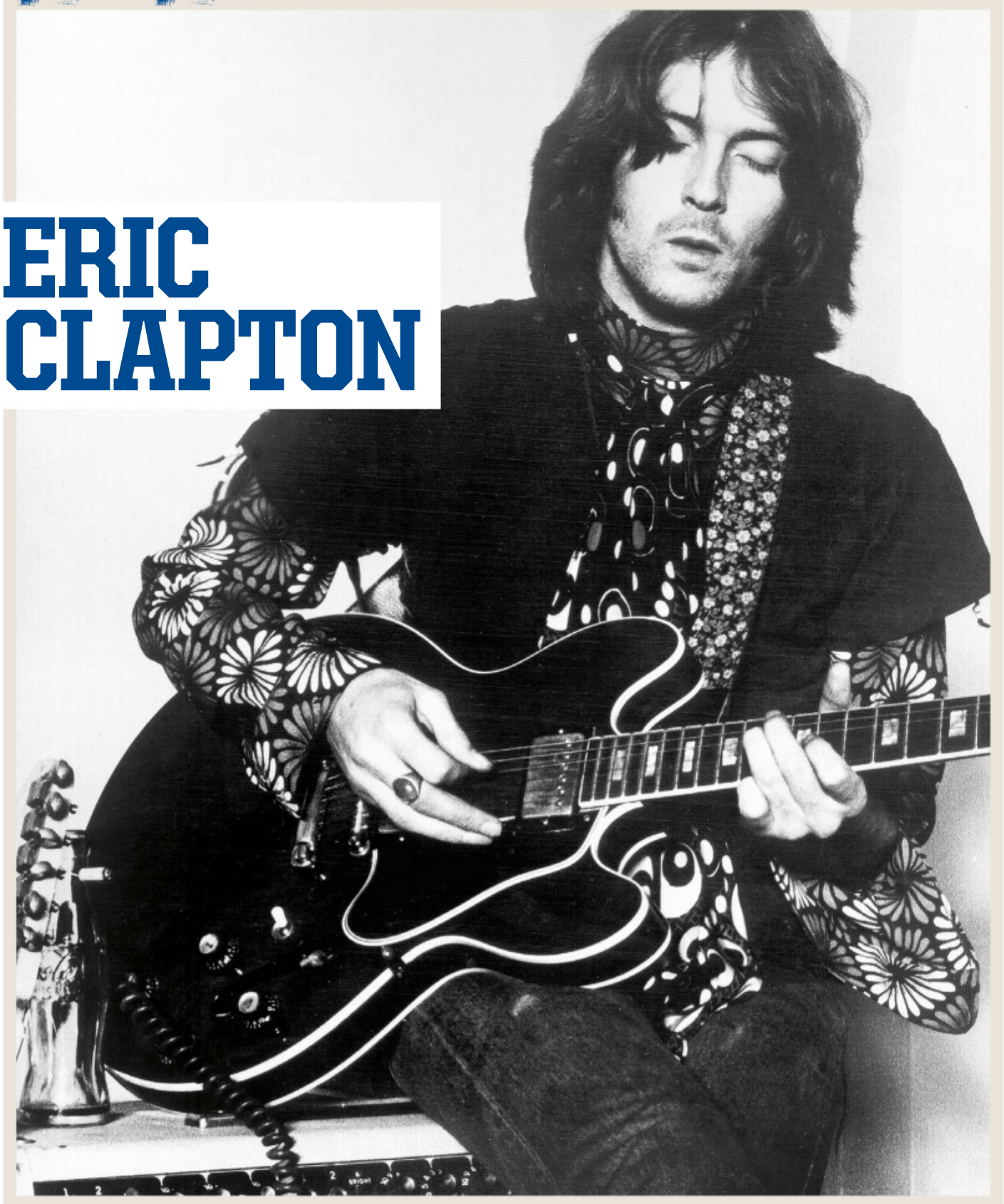
There are a few tricks at play here, giving a loose but fluid Hendrix-like sound in our first lick. Most important is that nearly every note lasts for its full duration and there are very few rests in the music – a great way to fill out the sound in a three-piece lineup. The ringing two-note shapes in bars 4 and 5 also help give a bigger, rounder sound.

USING REPETITION **BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO**



Repetition might not sound all that exciting as a concept, but it's something most of the great blues players use to some extent – you can't just play non-stop, unrelenting widdly pentatonics, after all! Our initial repeating part is a three-note idea found in bar 1. Bar 2 briefly restates the idea, before bars 3 and 4 take it somewhere new.

ERIC CLAPTON



The man they called "God"

The writing on the walls of 1960s London said everything: "Clapton Is God". Theologically unsound? Sure. But back then Clapton was providing plenty of evidence. He introduced himself with The Yardbirds before leaving for John Mayall And The Bluesbreakers. The band's studio debut, simply titled *Blues Breakers With Eric Clapton* but most commonly known as The Beano Album, remains a touchstone. But more greatness was incoming, and Clapton was in a hurry. He formed Cream with fellow Bluesbreakers alumnus Jack Bruce and cut some of the most classic rock tracks of all time. The Marshall stack was expanding the possibilities, and Clapton's 'woman tone' brought the electric guitar – in this instance his 1964 Gibson SG – closer to a soul singer's voice than anyone had got before. After Cream came the short-lived supergroup Blind Faith, before he recorded his masterpiece, *Layla And Other Assorted Love Songs* with Derek And The Dominos in 1970. Solo success, addiction and redemption followed. A disciple of the electric blues progenitors, Muddy Waters *et al*, and of Robert Johnson, Clapton immersed himself in blues history – an education that informed his playing across his career. The vibrato, however, that was all him. And it is godly.

PETER GREEN

The original Mac daddy and a Bluesbreaker with peerless feel

Clapton had left the Bluesbreakers, and those with their eye to a cresting British blues guitar scene looked at John Mayall as though God had abandoned him. Mayall knew better. He placed his faith in a new hot-shot player. His name was Peter Green and when he came along it was like the Second Coming. Just two of Green's tracks, *The Same Way* and *The Supernatural*, made it onto A Hard Road, his 1967 Bluesbreakers debut – but the latter in particular was a thrilling introduction, later becoming a canonical work of blues guitar. Green moved on, forming Fleetwood Mac in '67. Over four studio albums, he established the Mac as the premier British blues-rock band. His 1959 Les Paul Standard, aka Greeny, later owned by Gary Moore and now by Kirk Hammett, was key to his sound, its reversed neck humbucker offering an out-of-phase sound that was not of this earth, up there with the birds on Albatross, the perfect voicing for a visionary player. Green flew too close to the sun with LSD, and ultimately his career waned, but the tributes that greeted his death in 2020 were evidence his influence remained undimmed in his years out of the spotlight.

Photos Getty

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN

The pride of Texas was the ultimate screamer of tubes

Stevie Ray Vaughan brought physicality and soul to guitar playing, and he brought it in spades. The soul came through the speaker. The physicality was there for all to see. To watch him play, there were occasions in which SRV would throttle the guitar as though it were an arm wrestling contest at last orders in a Nantucket alehouse. His strings were the stuff of legend – 13s? No, 14s; 17s! Heck, some might argue he used piano wire. Either way, he went down the heavy-gauge route and had the dexterity to manipulate them as though they were dental floss. This, the fire in his belly, and the tone-gussying Tube Screamer playing mediator between Fender Strat and amp give him a range of dynamics that few, if any, players could match.

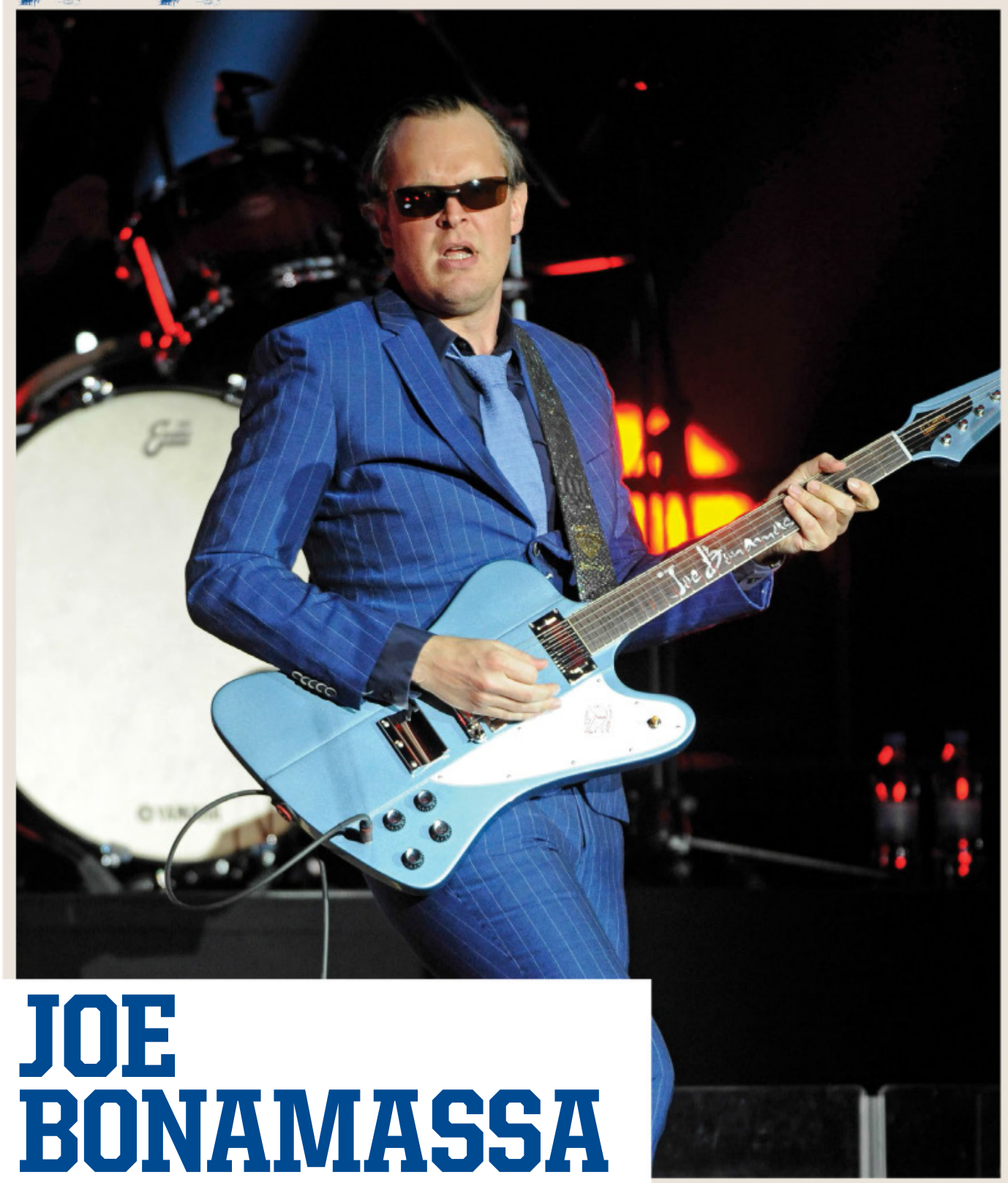
And yet, there was a tenderness to his playing. There are many who argue that his cover of Jimi Hendrix's *Little Wing* eclipses the original. That's for debate. What is not is that Vaughan, who was only 35 years old when he died in a helicopter crash, he left an over-sized impression on guitar culture in a short space of time. Just like Hendrix.

His debut studio album with backing band Double Trouble, *Texas Flood*, remains a blue-chip classic of the genre, and showcases the range of those dynamics. That title track – a cover of the 1958 Larry Davis number – could convince you that the sun never shines on Texas, least not while Vaughan was in it. The likes of *Pride And Joy* and *Tell Me* demonstrate what he could do with a groove behind him. Sadly, generations won't get to see him onstage, but so long as sets such as those at Montreux in 1982 are available on YouTube and DVD, more will bear witness to this singular talent.

GARY MOORE

The heavy rocker who went back to his roots

In 1966, when Gary Moore was just 14, he was already a self-professed 'blues snob', playing guitar in local bands in his hometown of Belfast. During the late 70s and 80s, with Thin Lizzy and as a solo artist, Moore dazzled as a shredder. But in 1990 he returned to his first love with *Still Got The Blues*, a totemic work of electric blues featuring George Harrison, Albert Collins and Albert King, while 1995's *Blues For Greeny* was another high-water mark, a heartfelt tribute to Peter Green, tracked with the legendary '59 Les Paul Standard he bought from his hero.



JOE BONAMASSA

The undisputed blues superstar and gear hound of the 21st-century

You kind of get the impression from Joe Bonamassa that his position as the highest-grossing blues artist of all time is a little embarrassing – thrilling, sure, but it's quite the affirmation. Perhaps this is why he has made it his life's mission to widen the blues' appeal. There's the KTBA blues cruise, the label, the production, Nerdville... But ultimately, Bonamassa leads with his fingers when it comes to advocacy, toting a muscular, pyrotechnic style that not only references the 60s British blues scene, and the pantheon of electric blues greats, and classic rock and prog when the song requires it.

DEREK TRUCKS

The best slide player in the world right now

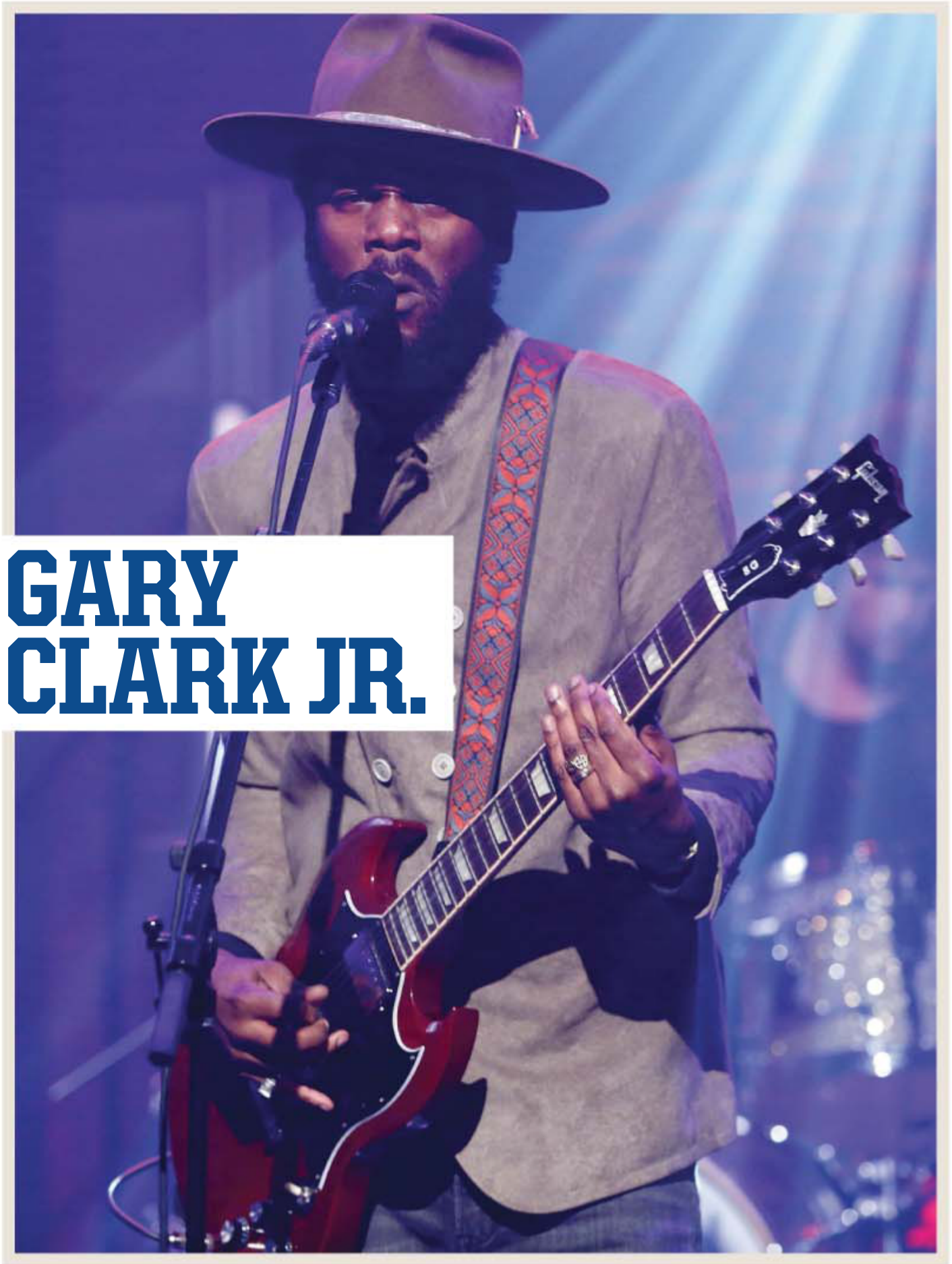
As the nephew of Allman Brothers' drummer Butch Trucks, Derek Trucks had music in his blood. He started out young, but has barely taken a pause since joining the Allman Brothers in 1999, and over the years has developed a slide technique that has found its spiritual home in the soulful, pluralistic styles of the Tedeschi Trucks Band. Typically parking his Dickey Betts signature SG in open E, using a glass slide and just fingers,

Trucks has a nigh-on supernatural command of dynamics, his guitar a foil to wife, Susan Tedeschi's vocals, cutting loose when its time to jam. And in TTB, they make the time.

JOHN MAYER

Radio-friendly unit shifter with a gourmand's taste for tone

There are overachievers and overachievers, and then you've got someone like John Mayer, the Berklee dropout who has harnessed a virtuoso talent in service of songs that speak to the internet guitar geek and the pop fan alike. He has helped reestablish the guitar's profile at the apex of popular music. When he is not out jamming Grateful Dead classics with Dead & Company, Mayer is pulling out his signature PRS Silver Sky, various vintage Strats and Martin acoustics – subliminally indoctrinating the world at large to blues-based guitar culture – and performing solo material that's gilded by this classic sense of tone and feel.



GARY CLARK JR.

The socially conscious polymath redefining blues for the next generation

Gary Clark Jr is a blues player but you might not have said that 30 years ago; the tent would not be big enough to accommodate all his stylistic turns through rock, folk, soul, and – look away, purists – hip-hop. But what is blues if not protest music and storytelling in verse, just like hip-hop? Clark's talent lies in bringing all this together without it making a curate's egg of it all. A song such as *Your Land* shows exactly what he is about, referencing Woody Guthrie, drawing a line through American history to confront the racism of today, and doing so with celebratory power. That's where he is coming from philosophically. Tone-wise, his guitar sounds like electricity that's geysering out of the earth. Whether he is using the Epiphone Casino or SG, his tone sounds godly, typically running his guitar through a Vibro-King, and referencing electric blues trailblazers such as Muddy Waters in refreshing and vital new contexts. Clark understands that blues is a contradiction unto itself, an art that must venerate its past and preserve its traditions, and yet be brave enough to imagine its future. That is the urgent business that Clark is engaged in.

ERIC GALES

Joe Bonamassa calls him the world's best blues-rock player

A child prodigy whose career was forestalled by substance abuse and a stint in jail, Eric Gales is soundtracking his redemption with a blues-rock style that is pure fire. Acquiring Joe Bonamassa's production services for his latest album, *Crown*, he lends his blues compositions a hip-hop braggadocio, underwritten by some of the most unearthly chops you'll hear. Seriously, the Hendrix and SRV comparisons are not just to put his playing into some kind of stylistic context.

We've seen him playing solo, improvising on the guitar for an audience of nerds at guitar shows in an atmosphere that might otherwise be artistically sterile, and yet he commands the room, alerting all in attendance that there are indeed new ways of expression yourself on guitar, in a style that's hardly new.

Gales is a southpaw and favours his signature gear; his Magneto S-style electric through a solid-state DV "Raw Dawg" EG signature head, with his MXR drive and Cry Baby in front. What he brings to the blues is simply himself, a player with a virtuosic touch and good sense to augment a piece with something off-menu – jazz, classical, whatever – to keep the audience at the edge of their seats.

Photo Getty

Words Ellie Rogers

"SOME OF OUR SONGS DON'T EVEN HAVE A SOLO"

Two guitarists, zero showboating: inside the retro-chic blues of GA-20

Perhaps more than any other genre, blues is sporadically subjected to having its vital signs examined to ensure that it is indeed still alive and well. Every once in a while, however, a band comes along to loudly assert beyond all doubt that the grandfather of all modern musical genres is doing absolutely fine without any such fuss.

Boston-based revivalist trio GA-20 are one such band. As modern practitioners of the lost sounds of mid-century Chicago blues clubs and juke joints, they first garnered recognition back in 2019 with their debut LP *Lonely Soul*. Next, they consolidated their rep as old-school aficionados with 2021's *Try It... You Might Like It: GA-20 Does Hound Dog Taylor* – a full album in homage to Chicago's legendary six-fingered bluesman. And with new album *Crackdown*, which debuted at number one on the US Billboard Blues Albums chart, they are once again demonstrating an ability to create 21st century blues music that purrs with all the warmth and vitality of those old Chicago 45s.

For lead guitarist Matthew Stubbs, the spark of interest was ignited young. "I got into this music because my father's a guitarist. I grew up with his band rehearsing in the house. He was into early rock 'n' roll and blues, so I've been into this style since I was thirteen – which is when I started playing."

As such, Matthew's guitar skills and his knowledge of mid-century blues and blues-adjacent genres developed in natural unison as he devoured records by Slim Harpo, Johnny 'Guitar' Watson and Otis Rush. After playing guitar for legendary blues harpist Charlie Musselwhite, Matthew formed GA-20 with vocalist/guitarist Pat Faherty and drummer Tim Carman.

"I DON'T USUALLY LIKE NEW GUITARS"

The band is unusually, but deliberately, a bass-free zone. "When we started, the concept was that I wanted as few moving parts as possible," Matthew says, "so that when we did gigs we'd actually make some money! But it was based on Chicago bands like Hound Dog Taylor, Little Walter, Jimmy Reed – all these guys where two guitar players cover all that ground." Following this all but forgotten blueprint, Stubbs and Faherty juggle bass, lead and rhythm parts between themselves, and will typically run two amps each to cover maximum frequencies. To occupy the low end, Matthew uses "a loud clean amp" like a Fender Bassman, with a second "quieter but dirty" amp on top.

Cue the GA-20: the highly collectible Gibson tube amp from which the band takes its name. Introduced in 1950 and kept in production only until 1961, GA-20s are revered for their velvety natural breakup at low volume, and you'll hear them on many classic early blues recordings. Matthew assures us that "at least a few" were used on Crackdown, alongside a GA-40 and a GA-18.

In the guitar department, it's no surprise that he also favours ancient treasures, with his most prized possession being a 1951 Fender Telecaster. But he also has love for "the more budget 50s and 60s guitars," and owns a collection of Harmony and Silvertone guitars from that era, including a mid-sixties Harmony 1454. For Matthew, the resurgence of these brands' appeal lies in the tonal uniqueness of their pickups. "Silvertones and Harmonies have gold foil pickups," he explains. "I'm not a huge humbucker guy. I usually like single coils, and I love Telecasters and Jazzmasters, but the gold foils just have their own sound."

Recently, he found a happy medium that combines Telecaster aesthetics and playability with the DeArmond gold foil sound in a custom guitar built for him by Waterslide Guitars – a Los Angeles-based company who specialise in making "Coodercasters." "I contacted them during the pandemic because I wanted a guitar that I could fly with that was kind of in-between my Telecaster and one of my Harmonies," he says. Now his main touring guitar, the Waterslide has two gold foils, a Bigsby, and "a big fat neck". The only instrument that could sway him from

SHARP DRESSED MEN
From left: Matthew Stubbs, Pat Faherty and Tim Carman

his old and gold collection, he smiles. "I don't usually like new guitars but I love that one!"

As well as benefiting from Stubbs' gear collection, a large part of Crackdown's old-school authenticity comes from the decision to shun modern recording techniques. "All our records are live in a room with all the amps and drums right next to each other," he explains. "We set up, hit record and we're really trying just to get the performance – not nitpicking and doing overdubs." A knock-on effect of this is microphone bleed – and lots of it. "There's no isolation," he says. "With a lot of modern music they isolate everything, but if you were to listen to the guitar mic, you're going to hear drums." While this might trouble many producers, it's something Stubbs, who produced Crackdown, is more than happy to embrace because it helps GA-20 sound "just like the old records."

He also made other equipment choices based on his deep knowledge of historical gear applications. In the case of *I Let Someone In*, for example, his guitar is bathed in a Magnatone-style vibrato – courtesy of a Big Tone Music Brewery MAGGIE pedal – to achieve "that pitch-bending vibrato, Lonnie Mack-type of sound." Similarly, the reverb-heavy tones of *Dry Run* took their cue from Slim Harpo's characteristically springy reverb sound.

Although they mine inspiration from a bygone era, GA-20 approach their craft with a garagey grit that simultaneously makes them ultra-relevant and sets them apart from others on the contemporary blues scene. "How do I put this?" Matthew says, pausing to ponder the delicacy of his words. "To me, a lot of modern blues seems like it's based around getting to the guitar solo." The GA-20 approach, he insists, is altogether different. "We try to write songs and some of them don't even have a solo. The blues that I grew up listening to was like that. They were shorter songs that told a story."

It's no accident, then, that *Crackdown* clocks in at just 28 minutes and has plenty of sub-three minute pocket-rocket tunes that keep any fretboard showboatery to minimum. Underscoring the matter, Matthew concludes: "If it needs a solo, we'll do it, but that's not the whole platform for writing a song for us."

“Blues should be a living art form”

Words Jenna Scaramanga

The music of **Larkin Poe** is both deep-rooted and future-facing, with one golden rule: **“Every song has to have a riff!”**

Blues has always been a part of Larkin Poe’s roots rock ’n’ roll approach, but for new release *Blood Harmony* the blues element is unmissable. And it hasn’t happened by accident. It’s the result of careful planning by the two sisters and multi-instrumentalists who lead the band, Rebecca and Megan Lovell – Rebecca the guitarist and lead singer, Megan the harmony vocalist and lap-steel specialist.

“In making this album, I think the blues organically found its way into the writing process,” Rebecca says. “In the last six years, Megan and I have actively deepened our understanding of the blues. We’ve really tried to go back and with a student’s energy study the artists that have come before and figure out how to authentically incorporate blues stylings into what we do. That’s been by learning tunes by Skip James and Muddy and B.B., really trying to walk the walk. I’m really proud of this album. I think it coalesces a lot of our loves into a single thing.”

As the sisters told TG last year, Larkin Poe found their sound by arranging cover versions in their own style, and early blues was central from the beginning. Their breakthrough came with a version of a Son House classic from 1930. “*Preaching Blues* was one of the one of the first blues covers we ever learned and it also was the first video that ever went viral for us, so it did feel like

there was a connection there," Megan recalls. "It was a very authentic thing that we just kind of stumbled into. Since then we've really delved deeper in picking up blues songs and kind of bringing them into this century, having a deep respect for those who have come before and created the foundation of all of rock 'n' roll. We have a great respect for the music but don't shy away from changing it to fit us, because it should be a living art form."

That synthesis of early blues and the Lovells' own personality brings us to the new album's first single, *Bad Spell*. Driven by an irresistible grind that made it TG363's Riff of the Month, it's an unabashed homage to a vintage blues standard. Ad Rebecca admits: "They're completely different songs in terms of the feel and the vocal performance, but Screamin' Jay Hawkins' *I Put A Spell On You* was the direct inspiration. Even just having 'spell' in the title, I was like, 'We're gonna skate pretty close to the edge here,' but I really I did write *Bad Spell* as a response to that type of song, where it's a bit swaggy, it obliquely threatens violence, and has this kinetic energy. So I piggybacked on that, and I think that is our way in which we engage with keeping the blues alive. I'm gonna learn the form and then I'm gonna free myself to colour outside the lines and trust that people are gonna come along with us."

The guitar tone in *Bad Spell* also marks new territory for Larkin Poe, coming courtesy of the Beetronics Royal Jelly overdrive/fuzz blender. "It is such a cool pedal,' Rebecca says. "It's really versatile and there's a range of tonal control that's really fun." *Bad Spell* sees Larkin Poe rocking as hard as they ever have, a direction they can afford having cultivated an audience that expects diversity. "We started calling ourselves 'roots rock 'n' roll' around the time that we started our own record label," Rebecca explains. "We embraced the biggest umbrella that we could in order to allow ourselves the most freedom, and I think that people have been really supportive of that."

Creating roots music can be a minefield: too derivative and you're dismissed as a tribute act, too original and you're accused of betraying the genre. It's a fine line that Larkin Poe tread admirably, digging into history without being restrained by it. Rebecca says it's a lesson they learned in a previous life as session musicians. "When we were touring with Elvis Costello, we were eating lunch and he was expounding on the importance of not putting yourself in a box. He is the perfect example of an artist who has had an incredibly diverse career. He does whatever he wants to do and the thread that connects it all is that it's Elvis Costello. He was telling us, 'People will try to attach specific genre tags to you. Keep them guessing. Just go where your heart tells you to go. Let your fans trust that you're going to curate something that they will love regardless of genre.'"

There is another thread that connects the songs on *Blood Harmony*, as Megan observes: "Every song has to have a riff! We are crazy about riffs! And we wanted to write songs that could stand alone, that didn't need production in order to be played. We didn't really produce as we went along; we didn't lay down parts and then layer as we were writing. If they worked with just the two of us, they went on to the next step."

Larkin Poe's sound is defined by Rebecca's voice and Megan's lap steel, and on *Blood Harmony*, both turn in some of their most emotional performances yet. As Megan says, "It's been a work in progress for many years to figure out how Rebecca and I really sing together, and now I mean sing as far as her vocal and my lap steel meshing together. It's something that happens very naturally now we know how to intertwine our ranges. I stay out of her way. It's a really fun puzzle to figure out because lap-steel is such a vocal instrument. I think the tone of my lap-steel does feel at times like a vocal or even like a cello. When Derek Trucks is playing it almost sounds like an opera singer to me. I think that's why people connect with it so much, it's such an emotional instrument."

Emotion is the primary driver for Megan's playing. "I always wanted to write riffs that feel like singing. I don't care too much about shredding. I think it's I think it's amazing to hear people who are such technical players but I love to play very melodically and try and tap into the feeling behind what I'm playing. If I can take out the thought

SISTER ACT
Above: Megan (left) and Rebecca Lovell.

"I ALWAYS WANTED TO WRITE RIFFS THAT FEEL LIKE SINGING"
MEGAN LOVELL

Photo Getty

'Is this impressive enough? Is this technical enough? What are people thinking when they're hearing my playing?' If I can take all that thought out and just connect with an emotion, that's when I feel happiest playing."

Most Larkin Poe songs are written around riffs, but *Blood Harmony* saw the band shaking things up with last minute changes. Rebecca: "You can sometimes get 'demo-itis'. If you make a demo you can get stuck with 'this is how the song should be'. We've been trying to challenge that in ourselves, letting the best ideas win and embracing the adage that writing is rewriting. You know, being able to dig back into the framework of a song and try to make each element better. Trying not to be precious about your ideas. On *Kick The Blues*, Megan came into the studio one morning like, 'All right, roll me! I wrote a new riff for it.' I was like, 'Oh! Cool... let's go!' And the riff is so badass."

Megan interrupts, laughing: "Admit it, you hated it at first didn't you?"

Rebecca thinks for a moment. "I didn't hate it, no, but it's still really uncomfortable to listen to because it was so blindsiding. I was used to hearing it a different way and I loved that. It was really a great exercise to listen with open ears and letting it hit you afresh."

Album opener *Deep Stays Down* was another song that was reinvented thanks to a last-minute riff from Megan. "I think the riff is really hypnotic," Rebecca enthuses. "It's just Megan on her little 1920s or 30s National lap steel. We were wrestling with that for weeks. We went through probably five different iterations of arranging that song, where it was like a hoedown and then it was a cinematic slow, spacey moment. We couldn't quite get it to sink into what it was supposed to be until Megan started playing that riff."

If reimagining a song as everything from a hootenanny to a film soundtrack sounds like fun, it should. "Creative tension exists when you're trying to make something and you don't know," Rebecca says. "The unknowing creates a lot of stress. You have to find ways to try and dispel the pressure. You want people to like the song. We have a finite amount of time on this Earth and we need to make a difference, come on dammit! All this stuff starts to tornado itself into 'Oh my god, what are we

doing?”” She reconsidered after watching the Beatles documentary *Get Back*: “Those guys were obviously serious, but the ways in which they were all goofy and they played with their music – they held it very lightly. That was a little bit of a revelatory moment. It can be hard keep that energy. It’s something that you have to learn, ‘We’re not gonna kill the joy out of this!’ Yes, this is how I make my living and yes there’s a lot of stuff riding on this, but being playful ultimately means there is more room for it to fully blossom. We want records that are authentic, unique, quirky and human.”

Megan credits their co-producer Tyler Bryant – Rebecca’s husband – with helping the sisters keep things light. “It was fun to have that energy in the studio. Rebecca and I have such a non-verbal communication and we can be very serious. It was great to have that third person in the room who is full of energy and very playful. It was really fun to experience more of that, ‘This might be weird but let’s try it!’”

Tracking at Tyler and Rebecca’s home studio also helped to relieve the pressure. “The studio can be an intimidating place when you’re stepping up in front of the mic and you want to be great,” Rebecca confesses. “Sometimes you’re not great and it’s okay to not be great. I think having our home studio vibes where it just felt like an extension of our home and we were able to be vulnerable and be kind of crappy and have it not matter as much, that was a really great facilitating angle for us to tap into something a bit more authentic and true.”

Bryant also introduced a staple of the Lovell’s guitar tone, his signature overdrive: the Rodenberg TB Drive Shakedown Special. It’s essentially two Screamer-style drives in one box, one with a gain boost and both with switchable bass boosts. “It’s a great pedal!” both sisters say at once. Their pedalboards had another new addition. “What’s that really crazy pedal we used?” asks Megan. Rebecca lights up.

“Oh, bro! The [Gamechanger Audio] Light Pedal. It’s three springs that are hit with light to make the springs vibrate. It creates these otherworldly weird reverb artifacts that will spiral and spiral. On the song *Lips As Cold As Diamond*, that’s what Megan is using for a lot of the howling, ‘verbed-out lap steel.”

Rebecca brought in a 1969 Gibson SG for some songs, but otherwise their rigs remain unchanged: Rebecca’s Strats and Megan’s Rickenbacker lap steel go through Fender Deluxe Reverb and Bassman amps. Megan, though, ends by casually dropping an exclusive new gear announcement: “I played my old Rickenbacker all over the record and I love touring with it. It has a unique holder so that I can stand and play it. I have been having some back issues because it’s really heavy, so I wanted to come up with a lap steel that was meant for standing. I worked with Beard Guitars and we have a new lap steel coming out that’s called the Electro-liege. It’s going to be announced very, very soon. It sounds a lot like a Rickenbacker. It’s got a Lollar horseshoe pickup in it, and it sounds beautiful. It’s very light and it looks cool, too!”

FORWARD THINKING
“We have a great respect for blues music but we don’t shy away from changing it to fit us,” Megan says.

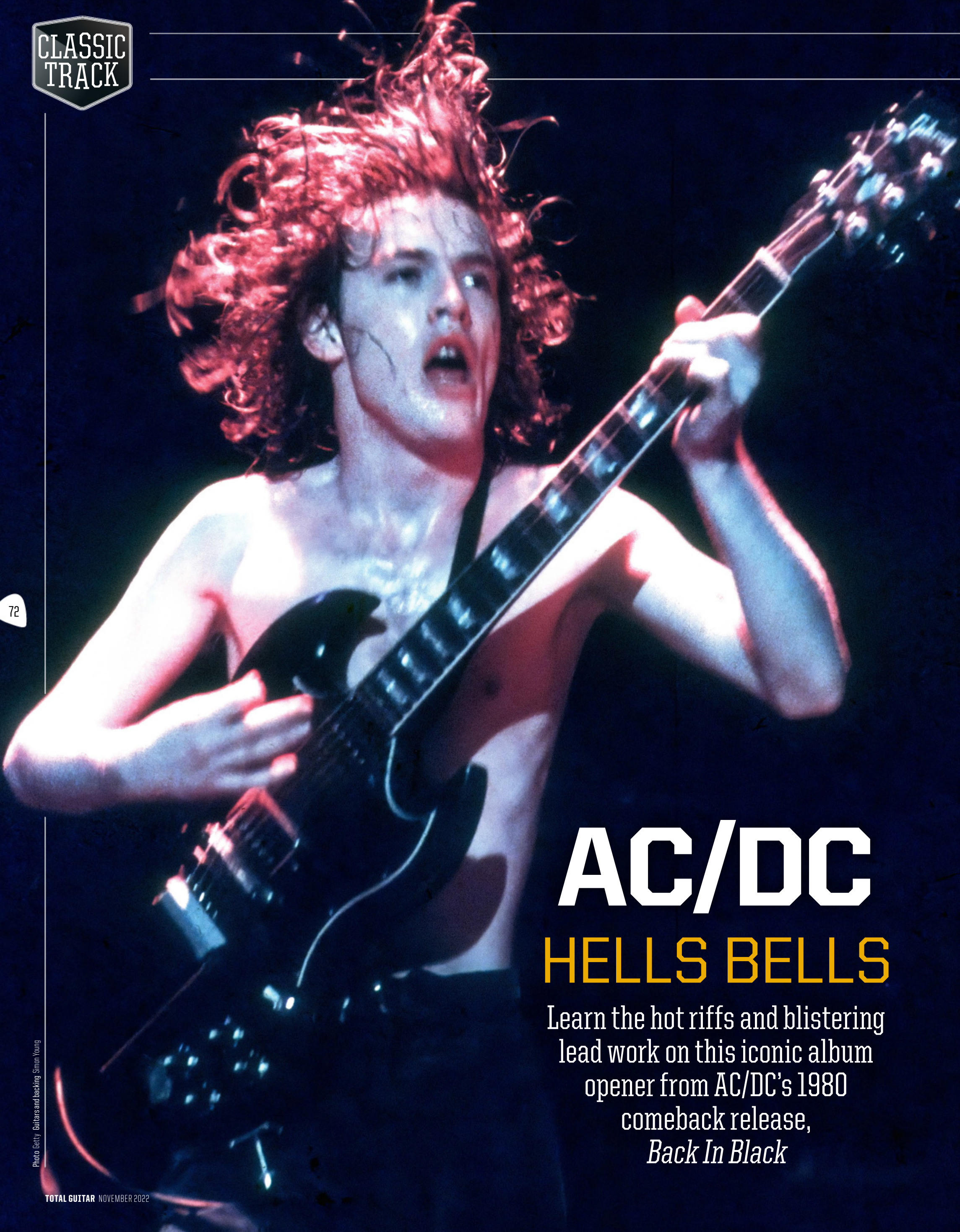
"WE WANT RECORDS THAT ARE AUTHENTIC AND UNIQUE AND QUIRKY AND HUMAN"
REBECCA LOVELL

REAL PLUGIN

LA-STUDIO

REAL TUBE HEAD | Two notes AUDIO ENGINEERING | SUPERGROUP DESIGN

Laney | Black Country Customs™ HANDCRAFTED IN THE UK | Two notes AUDIO ENGINEERING



AC/DC

HELLS BELLS

Learn the hot riffs and blistering lead work on this iconic album opener from AC/DC's 1980 comeback release, *Back In Black*

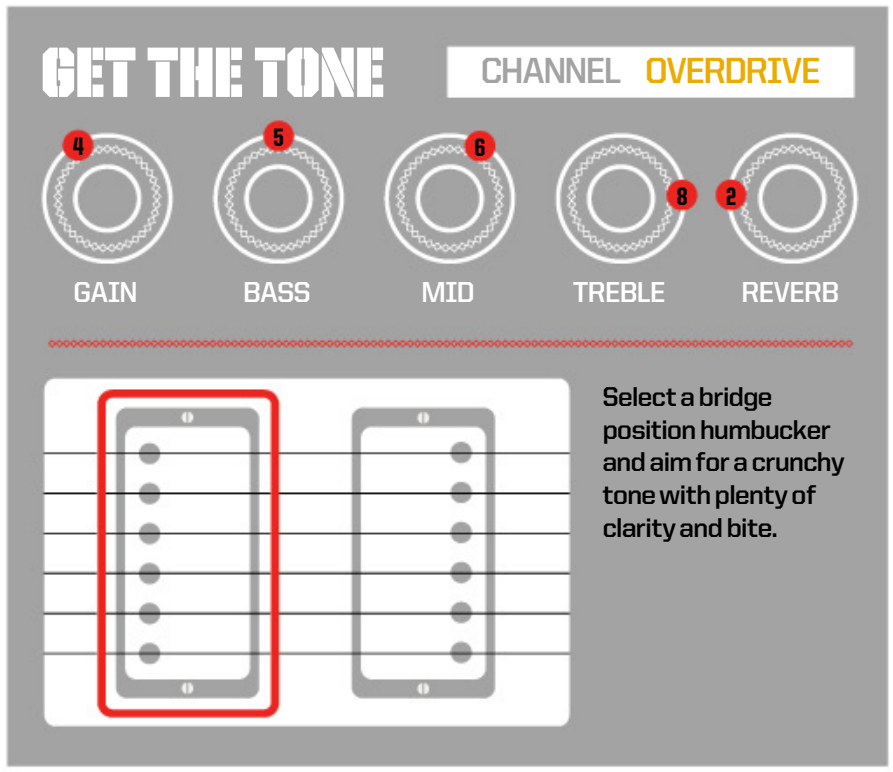
Photo Getty Guitars and backing Simon Young

SOUND ADVICE

Everything you need to know before playing 'Hell's Bells'

This month we're looking at AC/DC's iconic *Back In Black* album opener and staple in the band's live show still today, *Hells Bells*. This is AC/DC at their rocking best, and, with trademark driving rock riffs, easy powerchords and some incendiary minor pentatonic licks, *Hells Bells* has something for every guitarist.

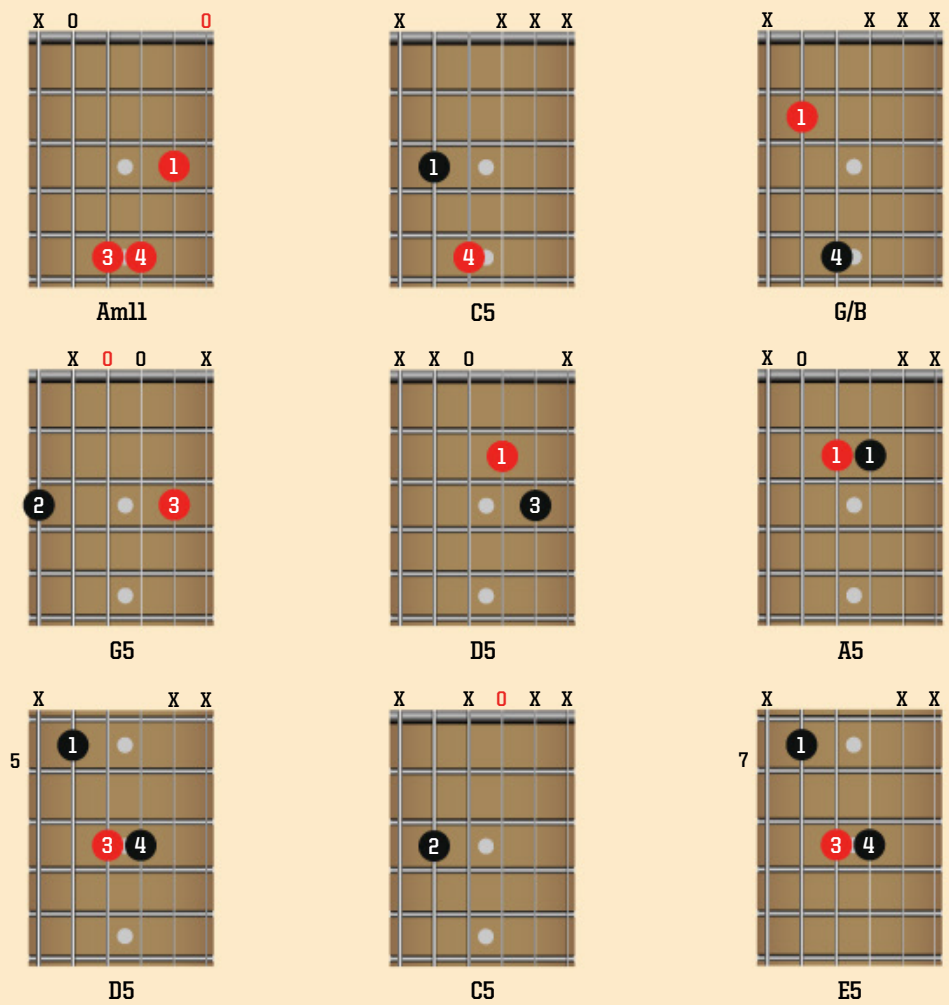
The main riff is an arpeggio that outlines an Am11 chord – and, though not too technically demanding, it can be tricky to get the feel. Practise slowly while making sure to always target the right string. Beware of the tempo in the intro, though. It shifts from a stately 96 bpm to a mid-tempo 108 bpm by the time the whole band comes in, so make sure to match your timing with the gradual push of the track.



Angus and Malcolm Young's bone-crunching overdrive and masterful delivery are a great lesson in the notion that less is more. A Marshall style amp is a core ingredient, as is the combination of Gretsch G6131 and Gibson SG guitars with bridge pickups selected. In terms of tone, the approach here was to just plug straight into the amp and turn the volume up loud. Simple. Assuming your neighbours don't share your interest in the sound of cranked Marshall stacks, wind down the volume, keep the preamp gain low (modern amps have more drive) and use a Tube Screamer style overdrive pedal for a mid boost on the lead parts. If you are in a position to crank a valve amp up loud, keep the drive low and aim for a loud, crunchy clean tone for the rhythm parts. Too much gain and fizz and that direct and powerful sound will be lost.

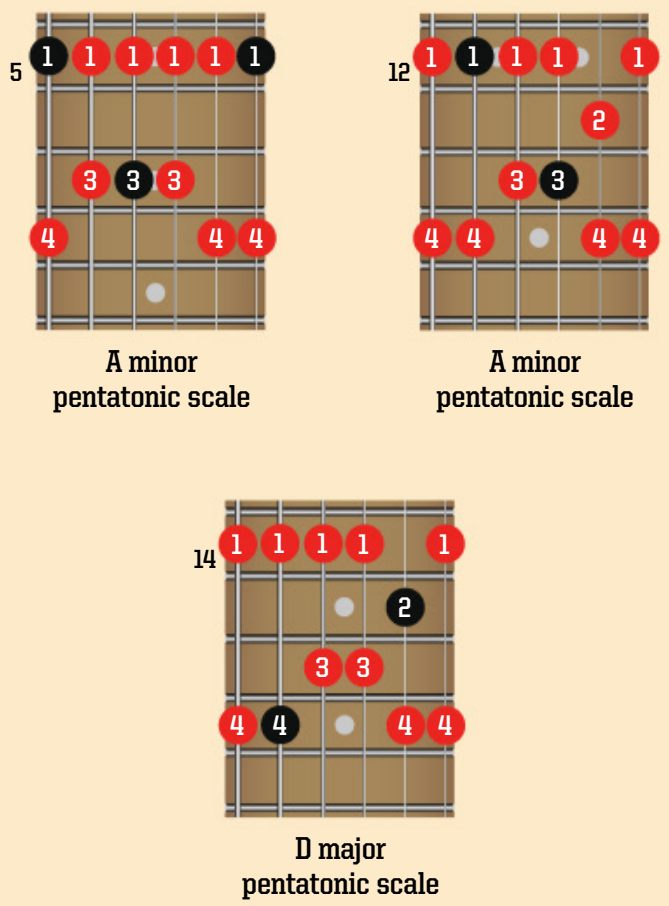
CHORDS

Hells Bells has five main chords to learn (A5, D5, C5, G5 and E5), plus a few variations. It's worth noting the G5 has no 3rd interval on the fifth string, thus turning it into a rockier sounding powerchord. We've included a fingering for an Am11. This chord isn't featured in the track per se, but it outlines the sound of the main riff and it could come in handy should you wish to strum out an acoustic version. The G/B is a classic way to transition between C5 and A5 thanks to the low notes in the chords which spell out a descending C–B–A bass melody.



SCALES

The guitar solos feature many of Angus's trademarks such as fast runs, doublestops and fierce finger vibrato. Most of the lead lines are based around the trusty A minor pentatonic scale, either at the 5th fret, mirrored up the octave on the 17th fret, and also in a slightly different shape at the 12th fret. We've also included a fingering for the D major pentatonic scale, which Angus uses briefly to add colour and contrast during the change to the D5 chord in the solo.



AC/DC HELLS BELLS

FULL TAB

HELLS BELLS
Music & Lyrics by Malcolm Mitchell Young, Angus Mckinnon Young, Brian Johnson
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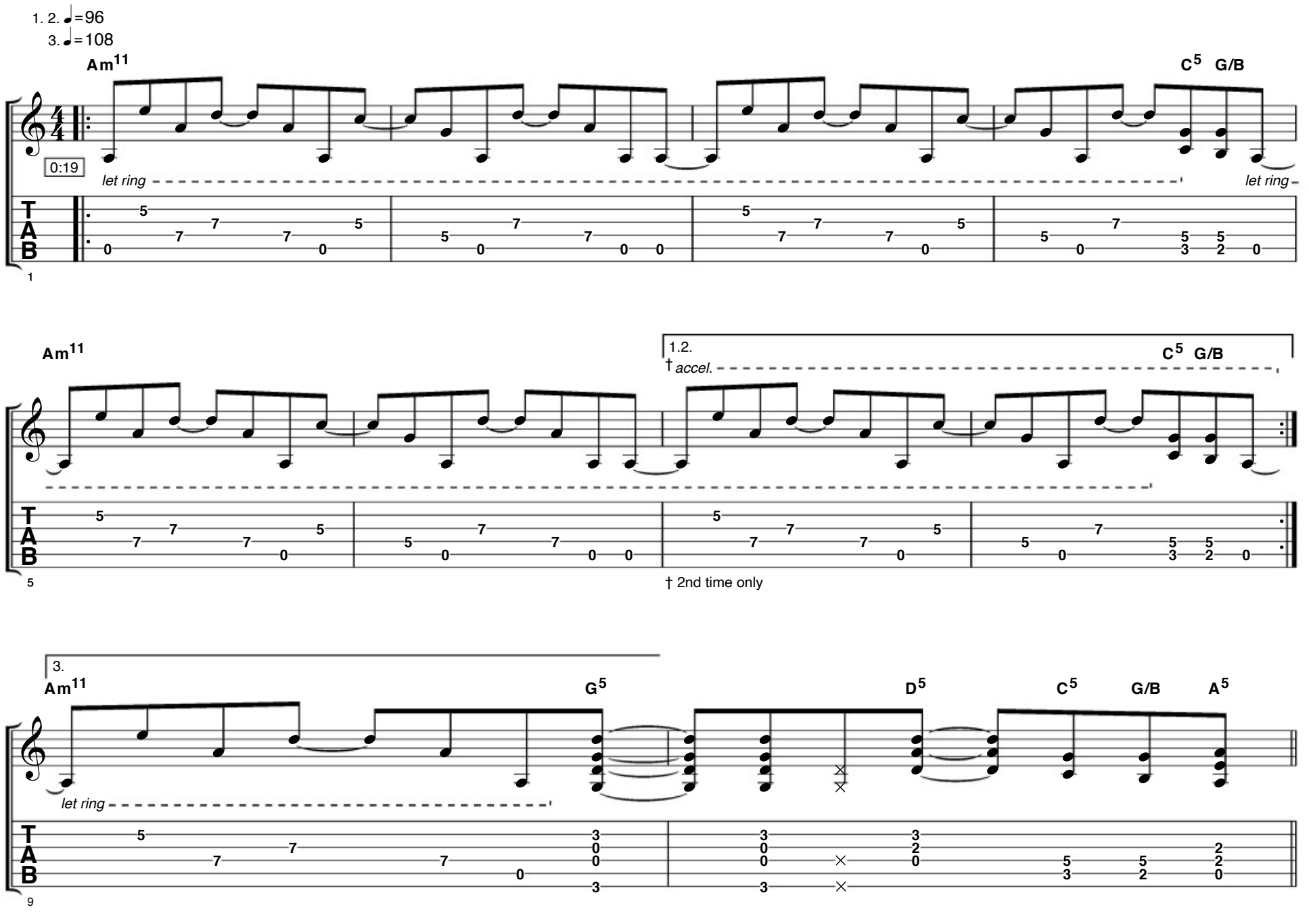
AC/DC HELLS BELLS Main riff

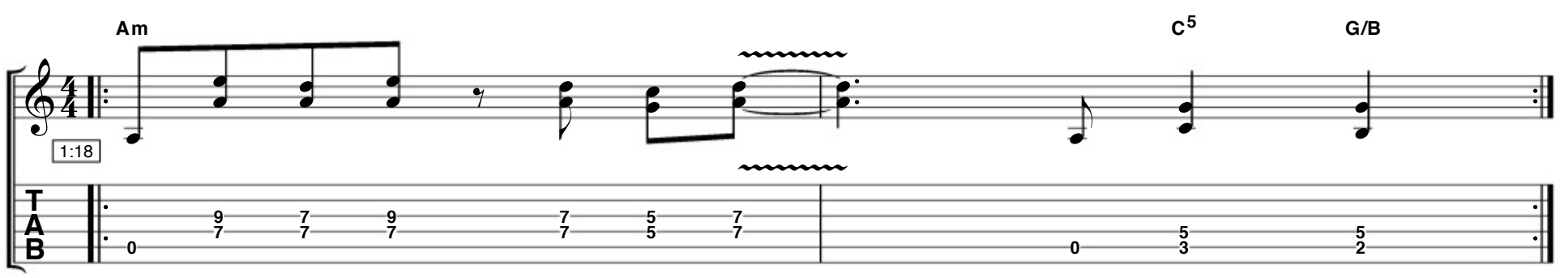
BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO



This riff features Angus' iconic arpeggio. It's tricky to play with a consistent feel so practise slowly to get the transitions dialled in. The tempo speeds up gradually so keep an ear on the backing as you play along. Listen out for Malcolm Young's supporting part which accentuates ringing A5 powerchords and the C5-G/B-A run at the end.

AC/DC HELLS BELLS Pre-verse

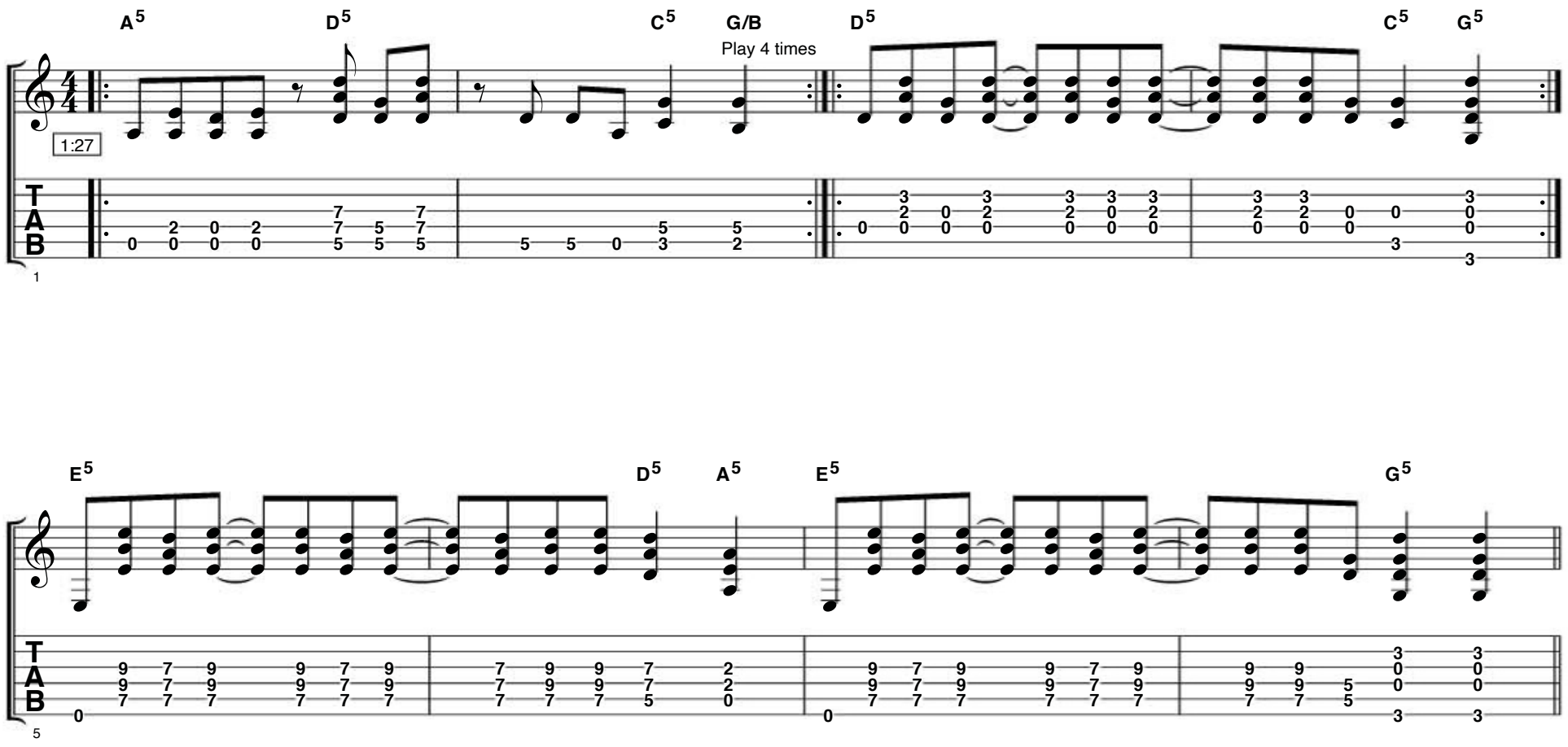
BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO



This section sets the scene for the verse with a classic bit of hard rock riffing. The finger vibrato on the last doublestop of bar 1 brings the part to life so be sure to include that. The C5 to G/B sounds great and only requires one note to be shifted. Play the C5 with your first and fourth fingers to make the change to G/B easier.

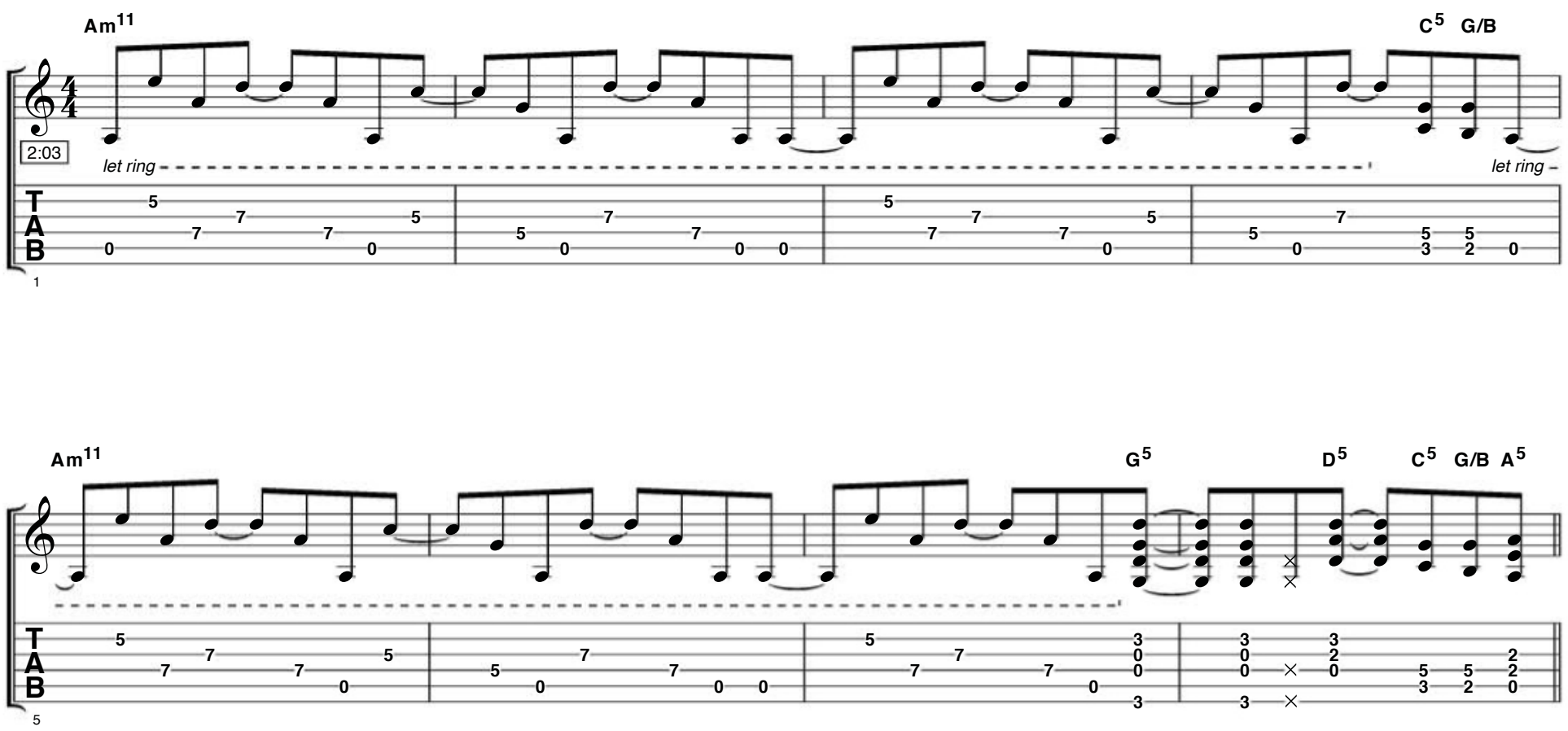
FULL TRACK + BACKING (BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO)
This song comes with a full demo track and backing track. Enter the above link into your web browser of choice; press play and jam along, guitaraoke style!

AC/DC HELLS BELLS **Verse** **BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO**



The verse section shifts tonal centre from A in bar 1 to D (bar 3) and then to E (bar 5). It creates a sense of movement and the E chords in the final bars help pull the music back to A in the next section. Make sure to keep the idle strings silent for clean, defined powerchords throughout.

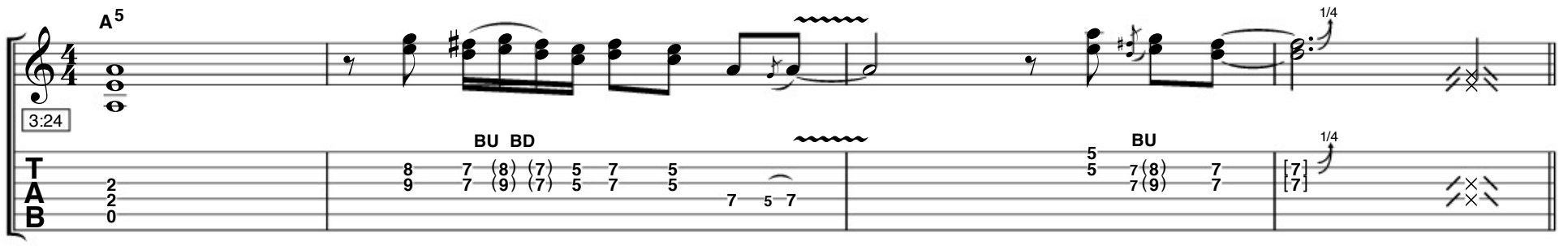
AC/DC HELLS BELLS **Chorus** **BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO**



The chorus section follows an abridged version of the main riff. Both Angus and Malcolm would play the arpeggio in full here. It's well worth recruiting another player to experience the full force of two guitars if you can.

AC/DC HELLS BELLS Pre-solo

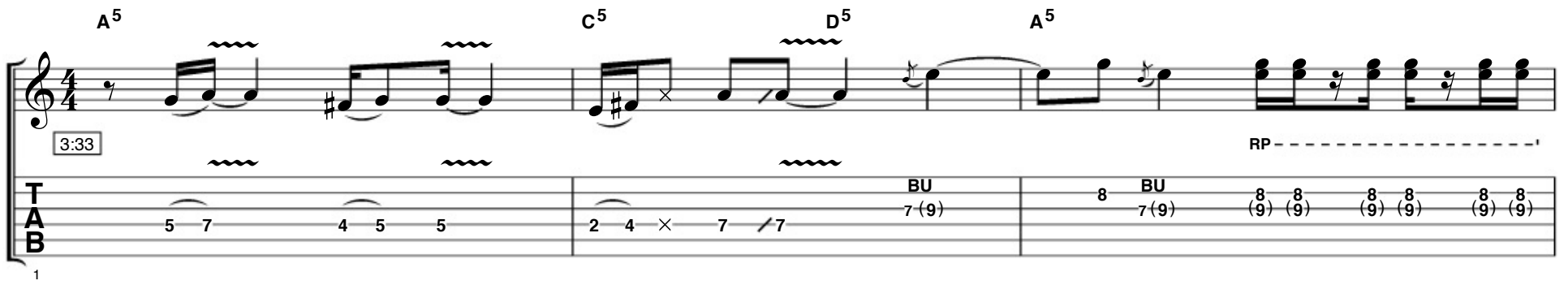
BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO

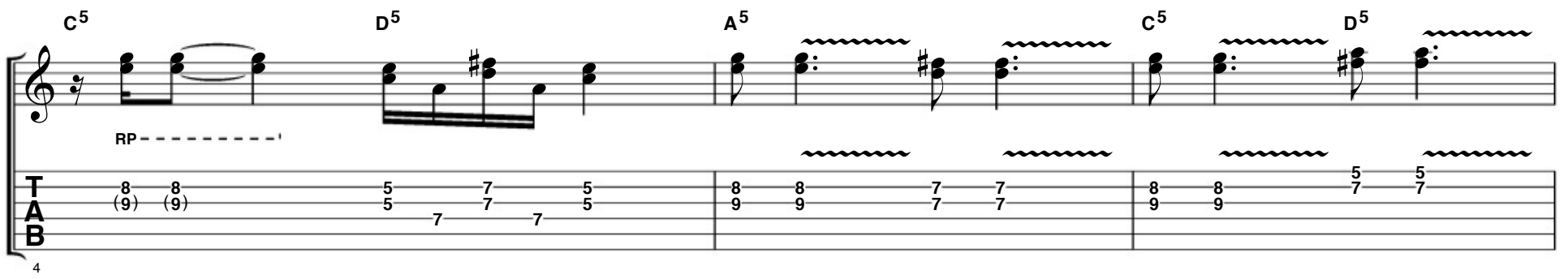


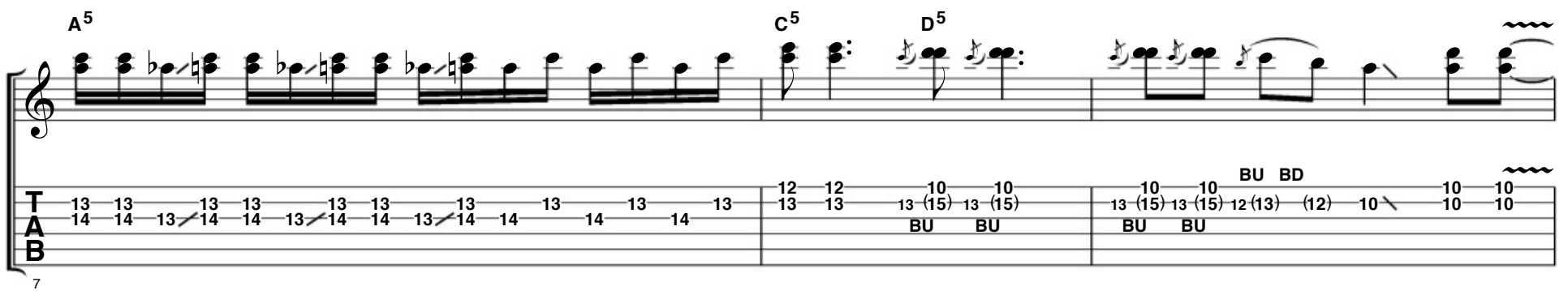
The pre-solo features some tasteful bluesy doublestop licks. These will sound most authentic if played with the fingers – just keep hold of your pick between thumb and first finger, then pluck with your second and third fingers. Start this section with your guitar volume lowered slightly, then raise it to full on the final notes.

AC/DC HELLS BELLS Guitar solo 1

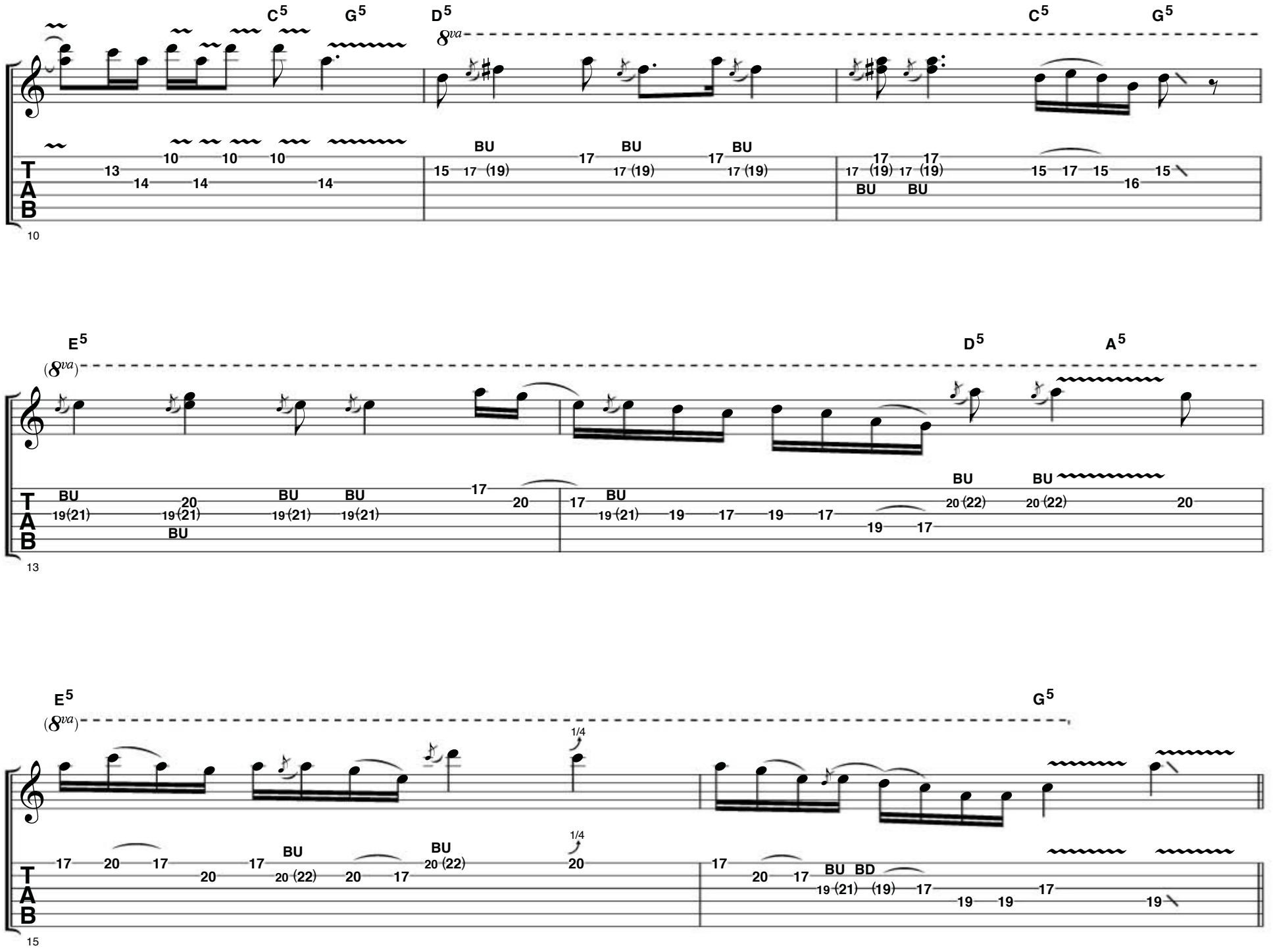
BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO





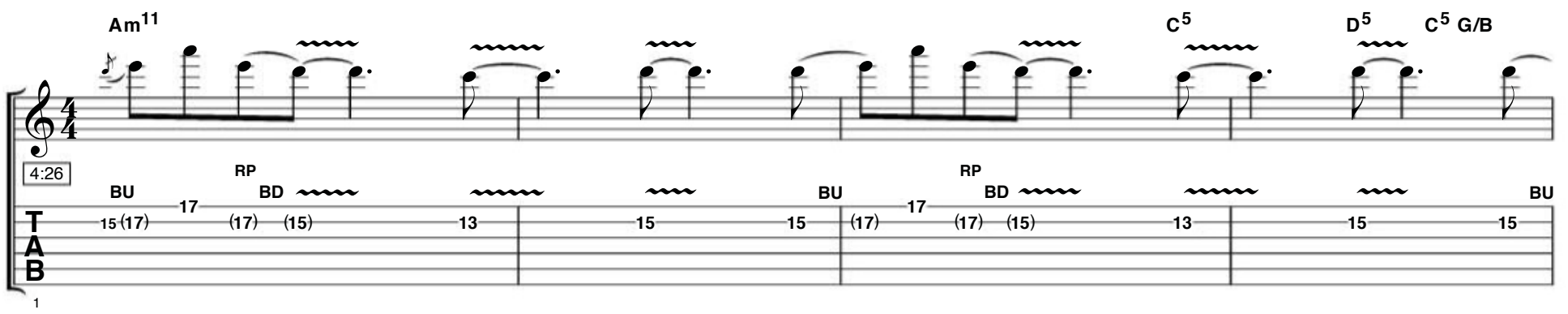


AC/DC HELLS BELLS Guitar solo 1 (cont'd) **BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO**



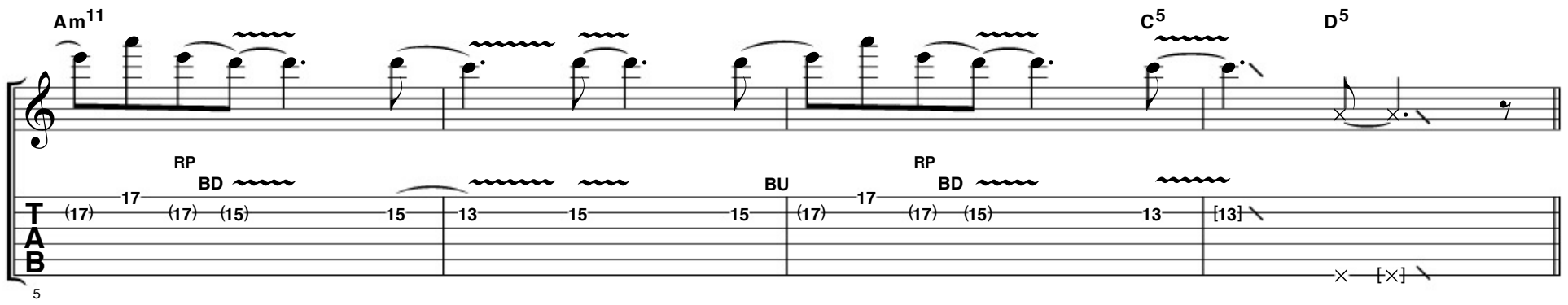
The vibe here is frenetic, with moments of improvisation and an emphasis on overall feel rather than clinical precision. Pay attention to which fingers you use to fret the doublestops. Get it right and each lick will fall under your fingers more easily. Listen out for Angus' trademark vibrato and aim to mimic both the speed and pitch range.

AC/DC HELLS BELLS Guitar solo 2 **BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO**



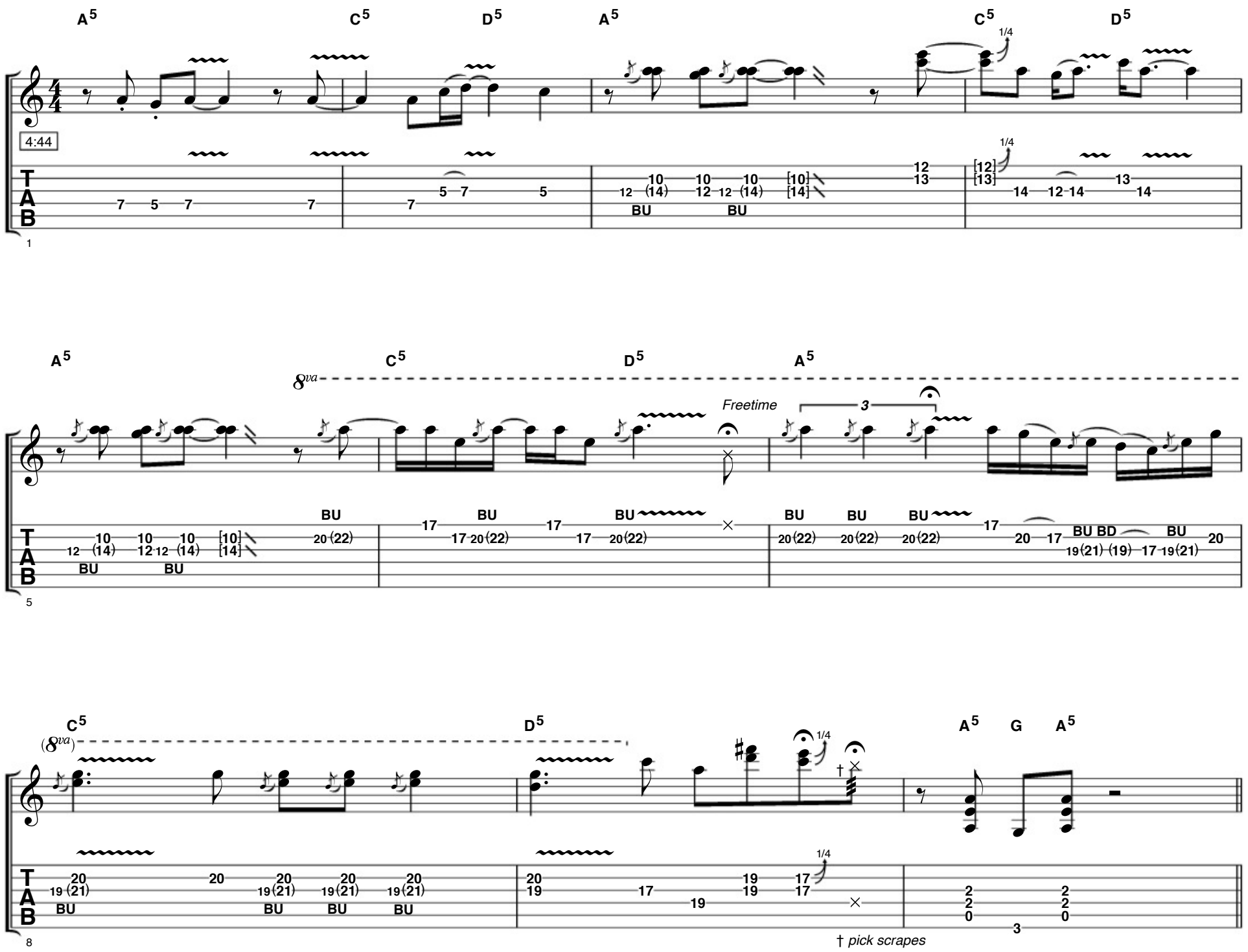
AC/DC HELLS BELLS Guitar solo 2 (cont'd)

BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO



The second solo opens with a melody line played over the chorus, emphasising the top notes of the riff. The main thing to practise is bending the D note on the second string up a tone to E and back down.

AC/DC HELLS BELLS Outro solo

BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO

This section features more trademark soloing up at the dusty end of Angus' SG. At the end the rhythm section breaks down into free time and we've noted these pauses (shown with fermata symbols: 𝄐). It may take a few practice runs to get the licks to fit. This type of ending would have been recorded live so it's all down to feel.

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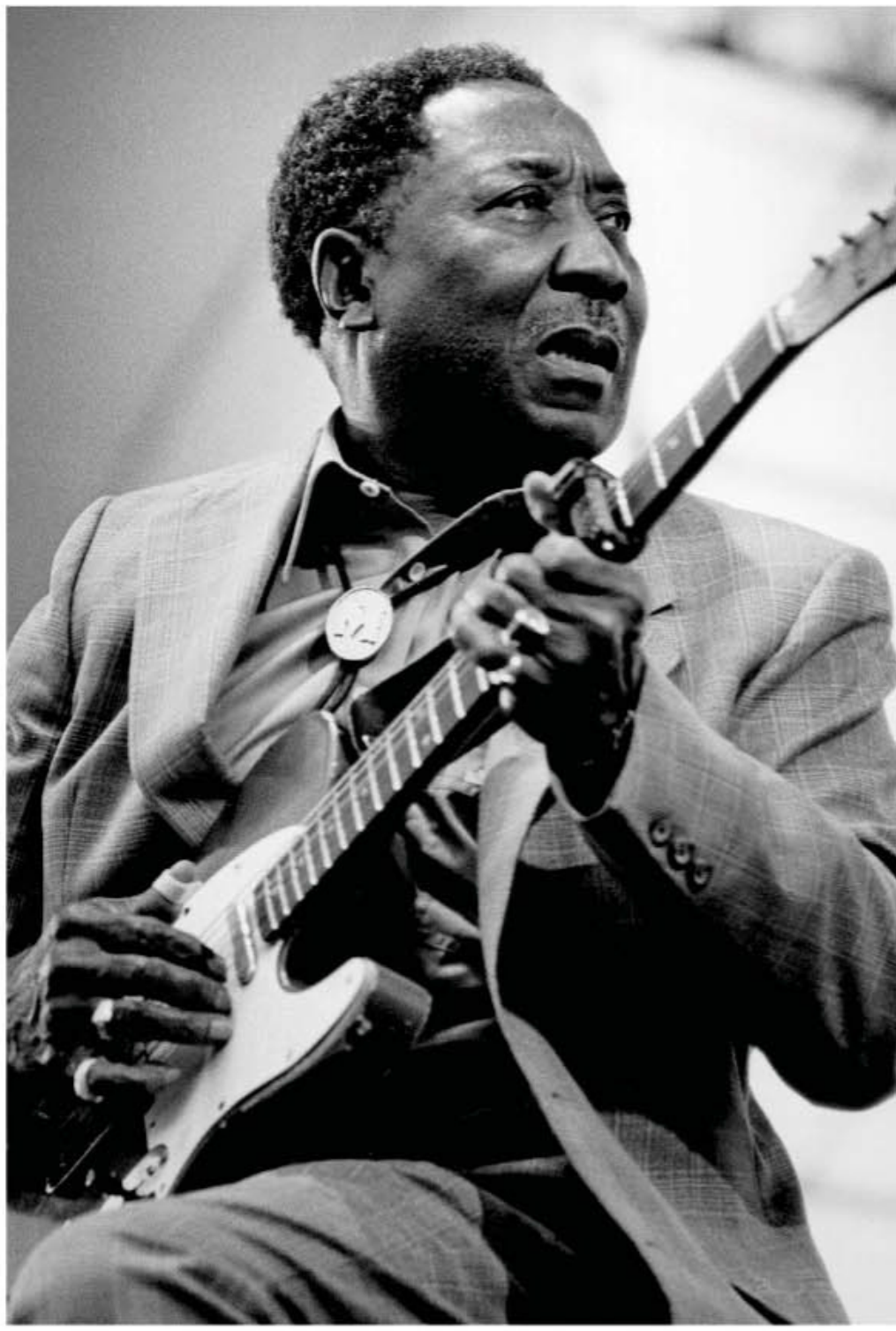
MUDDY WATERS
HOOCHIE COOCHIE MAN

TG takes a look at Rockschool's beginner version of Muddy Waters' signature cut



Rockschool's pre-Grade One 'Debut' arrangement of this blues classic is based on Muddy Waters' vocal line, mimicking his stylistic blues phrasing and creating a 'question and answer' pattern with the backing instrumentation.

The small notation in the pick-up bar shows the drum pattern cueing the first full bar of music. There is also a shuffle indication at the top of the score, meaning that for each beat, where eighth notes are usually evenly spaced, they are now 'swung', i.e., the first eighth lasts longer than the second. This creates the characteristic blues shuffle groove, and will help you to play the rhythms of each phrase.

The song can be played with one finger-per-fret in the 1st position, meaning that the first finger plays notes on the 1st fret, the second finger on the 2nd fret, and so on. However, the melody sometimes breaks away from stepwise patterns, so be prepared to alter your fretting approach. Aim for the smallest finger movements possible to make those note changes as slick as can be.

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Whether you're taking your first steps on guitar or moving into further/higher education, a Rockschool Grade will improve your playing ability whilst you learn iconic tracks from the world of popular music. For more info visit: www.rslawards.com

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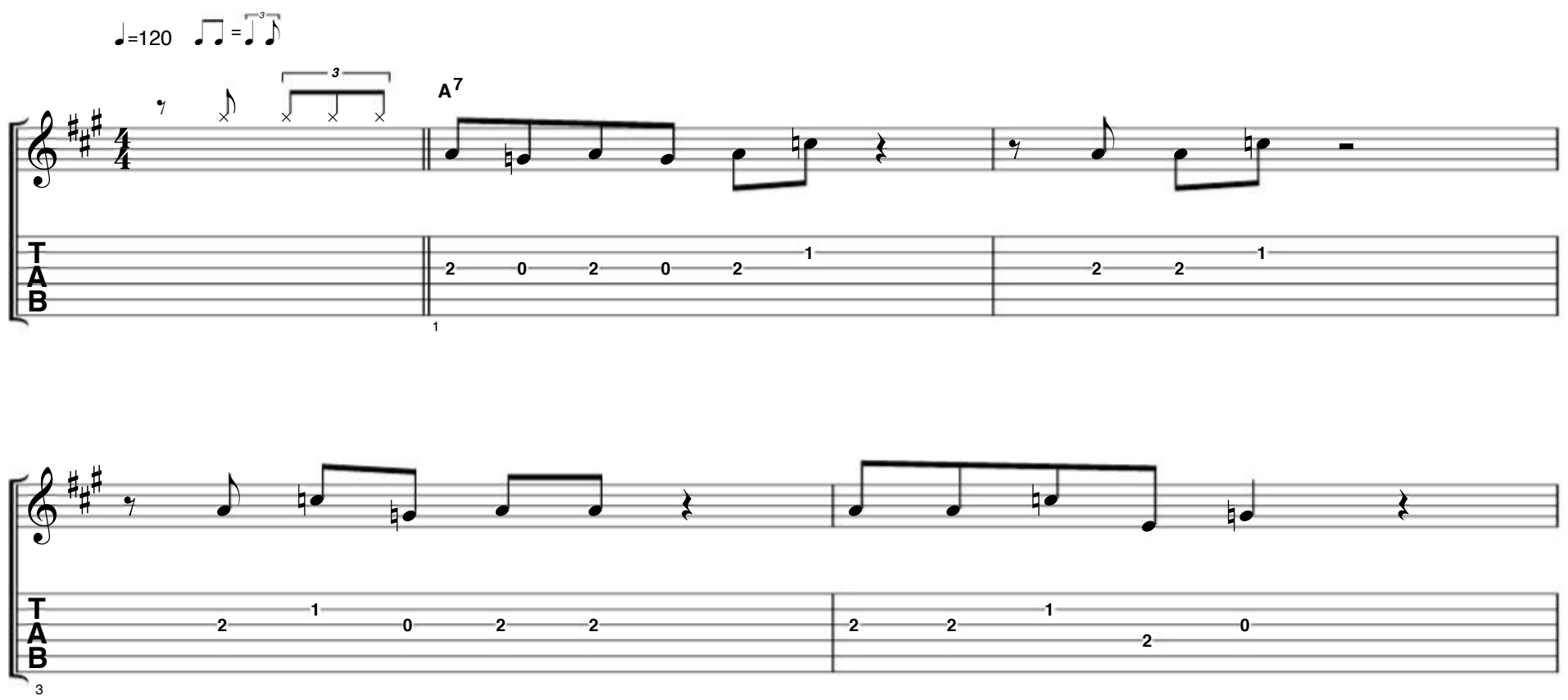
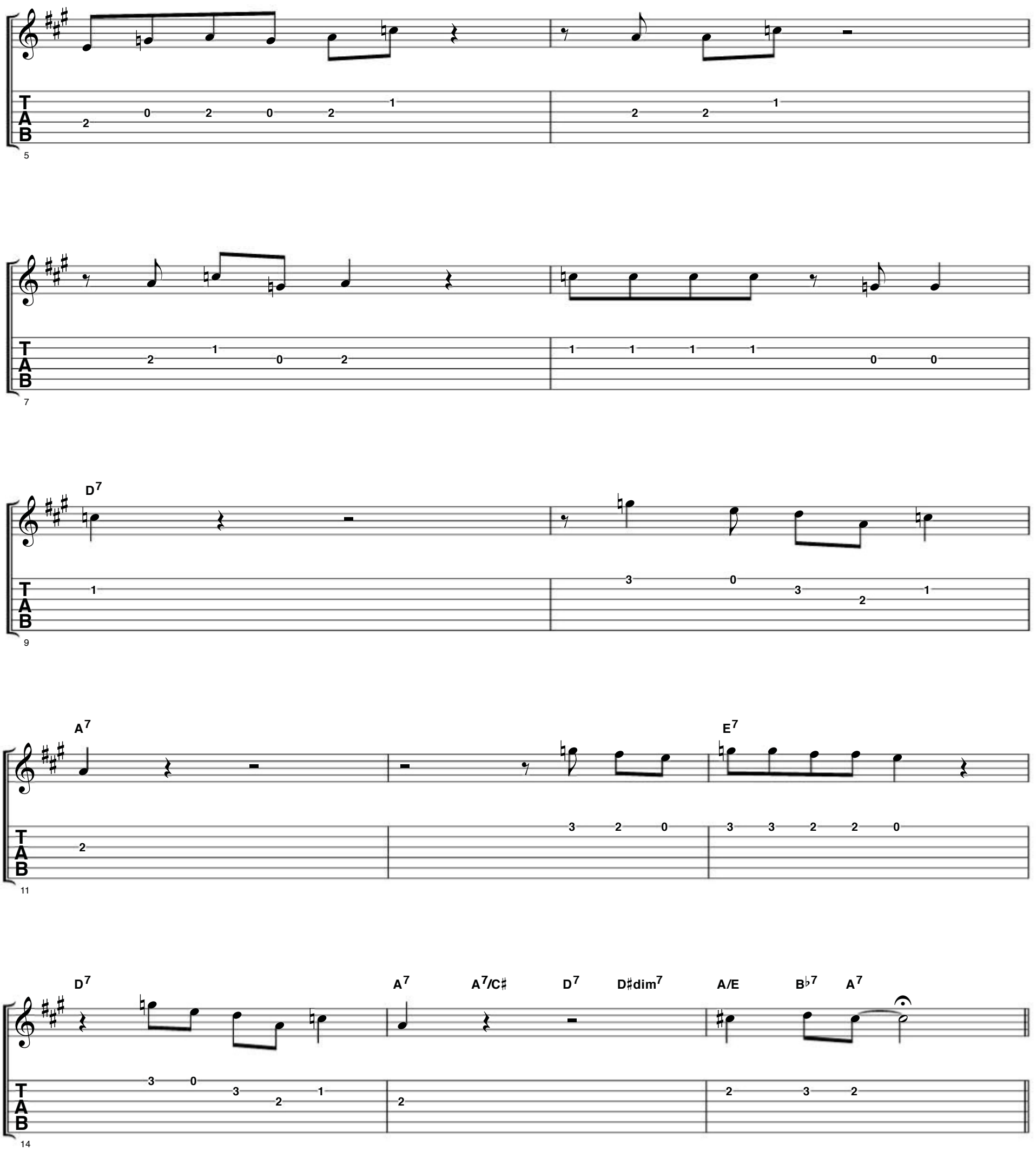
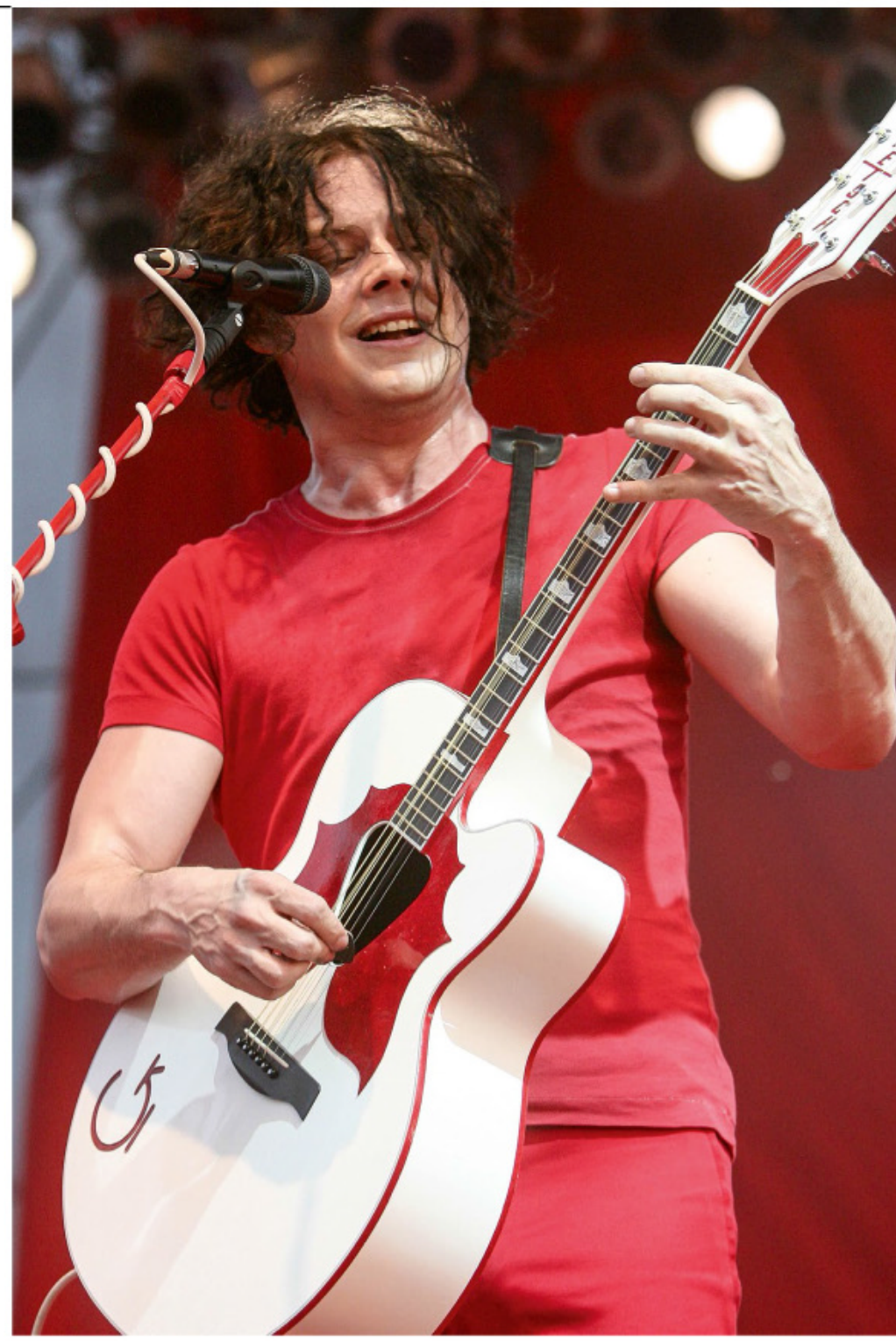
MUDDY WATERS HOOCHIE COOCHIE MAN



Words Jono Harrison Photo Getty

MUDDY WATERS HOOCHIE COOCHIE MAN

This is a great workout for your lead playing. Keep your picking hand close to the strings, only travelling as far as you need to strike each note. There are some challenging passages, such as in bar 2, which involves an entry on an offbeat. Try playing this with an upstroke followed by a downstroke on beat 2 for the best feel and timing. An alternative picking approach may suit your style – the key is to be consistent – but make sure that your eighth notes have that bluesy swing!



OPEN-MIC SONGBOOK

THE WHITE STRIPES
HOTEL YORBA

Master Jack White's country-tinged strummer with a handful of easy chords and some relaxed playing

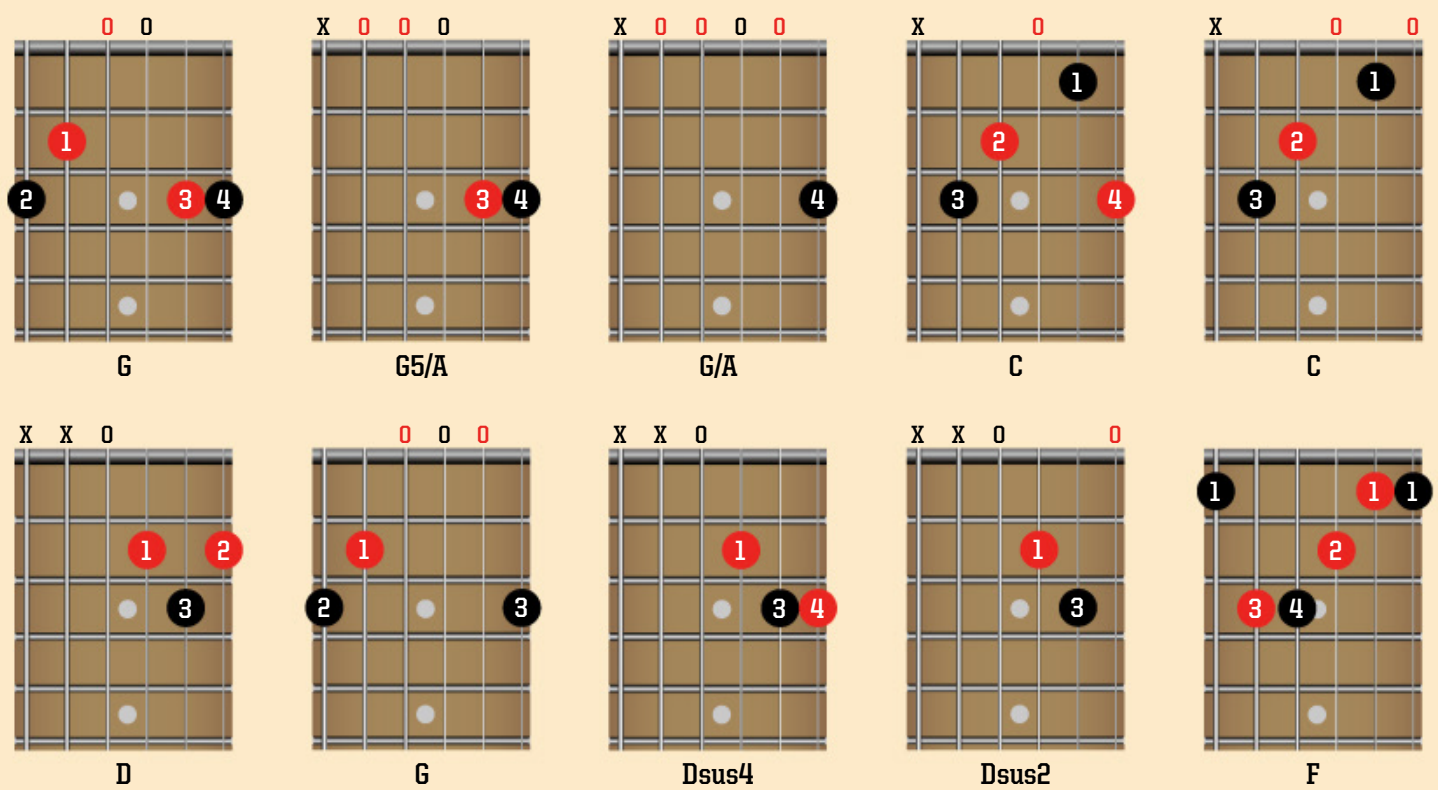
These days Jack White is reaching new heights in his career as a solo artist, having released two triumphant albums this year alone (*Fear Of The Dawn* and *Entering Heaven Alive*). Of course, he made his name in the early 2000s as one half of garage rock revival duo The White Stripes, and this month's song is one of their biggest tunes. As it happens, it's still a regular number in Jack's solo sets today, too.

Essentially, the song boils down to just three open chords and one barre. The rest of the shapes you see below are simple variations and passing chords – and none are a vital part of the song. If you can play G, C, D and F you should be able to get through the whole track.

Jack uses a loose strumming motion throughout, rarely ever playing the part exactly the same way twice. As long as you're playing the right chords there's plenty of room to experiment with your own strumming patterns. Just take note of the light 16th note swing feel and you'll get a feel for the rhythm.

CHORDS

At the heart of *Hotel Yorba* are the G, C and D chords, plus an F at the end of the chorus. Notice there are two voicings of the G and C chords, but feel free to experiment with these. There's also a brief flourish on a Dsus4–D–Dsus2–D progression on the word 'inside' in the chorus that we just can't fit in the songsheet. Just stay on the D here if it's easier. Finally, note that the G5/A and G/A chords you see in the tab are brief passing chords, so we've not included them in the songsheet.



HOTEL YORBA
Words and Music by John Anthony White
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Guitars and backing Simon Young. Photo Getty

BACKING TRACK (BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO)
This song comes with a full backing track. Enter the above link into your web browser of choice; press play and jam along, guitaraoke style!

SONGSHEET

Hotel Yorba

Intro
G / / / / / / /

Verse 1
G
I was watching
C
With one eye on the other side
D
I had fifteen people tellin' me to move
G
I got movin' on my mind

I found shelter
C
In some thoughts turning wheels around
D
I said thirty-nine times that I love you
G
To the beauty I had found

Chorus
G
Well, it's one, two, three, four
C
Take the elevator at the Hotel Yorba

I'll be glad to see you later
D G F G
All they got inside is vacancy

Interlude
G / / / C / / / D / / / G / / /

Verse 2
G
I've been thinking
C
Of a little place down by the lake
D
They got a dirty old road

Leading up to the house
G
I wonder how long it will take

'Til we're alone
C
Sittin' on the front porch of that home
D
Stompin' our feet on the wooden boards
G
Never gotta worry 'bout locking the door

Repeat chorus

Breakdown
G / / / C / / / D / / / G / / /

Verse 3
G
It might sound silly
C
For me to think childish thoughts like these
D
But I'm so tired of acting tough
G
And I'm gonna do what I please

Let's get married
C
In a big cathedral by a priest
D
'Cause if I'm the man

That you love the most
G
You could say "I do" at least

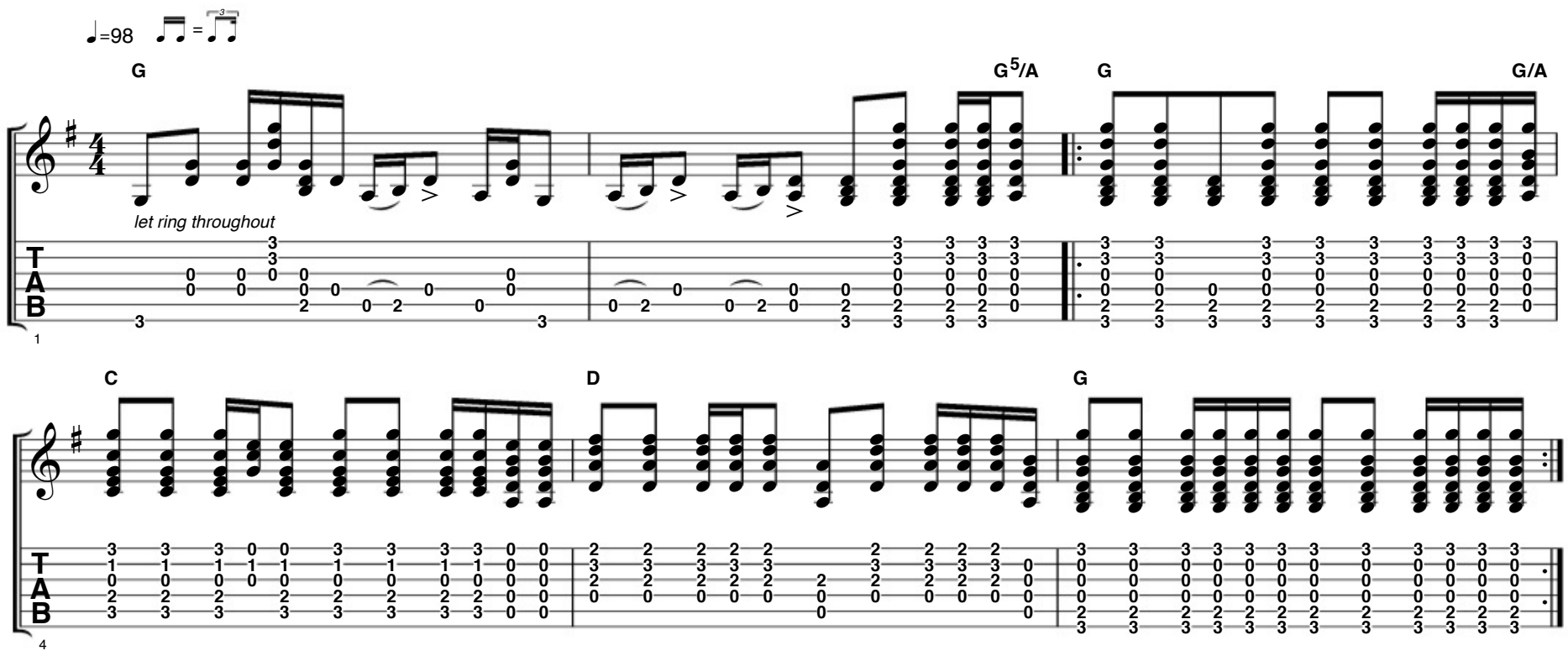
Outro chorus
G
Well, it's one, two, three, four
C
Take the elevator at the Hotel Yorba

I'll be glad to see you later
D G
All they got inside is vacancy

And it's four, five, six, seven
C
Grab your umbrella and grab hold of me

'Cause I'm your favourite fella
D G C G D G
All they got inside is vacancy

THE WHITE STRIPES HOTEL YORBA Intro / verse **BIT.LY/TG364AUDIO**



The opening two bars of strumming are the toughest part of the song, with some tricky rhythms and hammer-ons to think about. We've tabbed the exact notes Jack played, but as long as you're fretting the full G chord and playing the hammer-ons with your first finger it won't matter if the other strings ring out.

THE GAS STATION

REAL WORLD REVIEWS OF THE BEST NEW GEAR

Welcome to the GAS (Gear Acquisition Syndrome*) Station! Every issue, TG scours the market for the hottest new gear and brings you transparent reviews that you can trust. From the smallest of accessories that make your life easier, to big investments, such as brand new guitars, amps and effects pedals – if it's worth your attention, you'll find it here!

HOW WE TEST

CURATION
Our product selection is driven by our love of gear. We select the most exciting products on the market every month to bring you opinions you can trust.

FACE-VALUE REVIEWS
We're not gear snobs here at *Total Guitar*. We judge it on whether it looks good, sounds good and plays well – not by the name on the headstock.

***WHAT IS GAS?**
Gear Acquisition Syndrome is the guitar-player's never-ending urge to acquire new gear, irrespective of whether they actually need it. Don't pretend you don't have it – we all do!

NO SNAKE OIL
You won't find us getting hung up on hokey mythology or nonsense marketing speak: we aim to bring you bullsh*t-free opinions on the gear you're interested in.

WE CAN'T BE BOUGHT
TG review scores are a true reflection of our experts' opinion on the product they've been testing. You'll never find a rating in our mag that has been bought and paid for.

REAL WORLD REVIEWS
We test every product under the conditions that they were designed for. For example, if an amp is designed to be played loud, rest assured that we'll have tested it at rehearsal/gig volumes!

BEST BUY AWARD
TG Best Buy Awards are reserved for stand-out products that earn a 4.5 star overall rating. This is the most exciting new gear that you *need* to check out

Total Guitar BEST BUY AWARD

PLATINUM AWARD
Reserved for the very best of the best, TG's Platinum Awards are given to class-leading, gamechanging products that score a maximum 5 stars in every category.

Total Guitar PLATINUM AWARD

★★★★★ SUPERB, A BEST BUY
★★★★½ EXCELLENT
★★★½ ABOVE AVERAGE KIT
★★½ SOME ISSUES
★½ POOR

85 START ME UP
Five new products you need to check out

86 CHAPMAN ML2 PRO
A revamped modern singlecut that might detach the man from the brand

90 SQUIER 40TH ANNIVERSARY JAZZMASTER GOLD EDITION
The price of gold...

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Blackstar gets serious about scaling down

94 ELECTRO-HARMONIX J MASCIS RAM'S HEAD BIG MUFF
EHX's Ram's Head gets a signature facelift

START ME UP!

Five awesome new products to get your gear engine revving this month...

FENDER TONE MASTER PRINCETON REVERB

1 Another iconic Fender combo gets the Tone Master treatment; the aim being a lighter weight and accurately modelled tones without the worry of valve or back failure. Tone Masters have already wooed discerning touring pros including Lenny Kravitz and Pearl Jam's Mike McCready. Built in IR cab sims on this 10" combo widen the scope for recording options, with the original amp's onboard reverb and tremolo effects adding to the appeal as a great pedal platform and clean machine.

£799 (available November)
www.fender.com

BOSS GA-FC EX FOOT CONTROLLER

2 The Boss Katana range of amps have been a massive success and this new controller enhances the MkII models's usability for home, rehearsal room or stage. Dual-colour LEDs making channel-switching easier – especially in low lighting – and an effects switch allows players to toggle between Effects and Function mode. In Effects mode, the LEDs illuminate green and the GA-FC EX becomes a virtual pedalboard; players can turn its vast array of effects on and off in the chain.

£129
www.boss.info

CATALINBREAD X40 SOFT FOCUS REVERB

3 The Yamaha FX500 rack unit was a favourite of Slowdive on their 1993 album *Souvlaki*; a plate reverb taken into ambient places with added layers, and now available in pedal form thanks to the folks at Catalinbread. Think dreamy reverb split into three paths with a multi-voiced chorus and subtle octave-up 'Symphony'. While it loses the fixed-time digital delay of the original, it couples all controls to the tone of the reverb to allow for exploration.

£179
www.catalinbread.com

MARTIN 000JR-10E SHAWN MENDES

4 Mendes might be mates with John Mayer, but his Martin signature model is nowhere near the price of the *Gravity* man's. It's also an eco-friendly build certified by the Forest Council, and Martin will be making a charity contribution to support the Shawn Mendes Foundation via the Wonder of Music Program at The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) in Toronto. The electro 000 also features a swallow engraved on the bridge to match Mendes' own hand tattoo.

£869
www.martinguitar.com

MXR CUSTOM SHOP DUKE OF TONE

5 A new royal engagement for your pedalboard? First there was the Analog Man King Of Tone (currently with a five-year waiting list). Next came the single-channel Prince Of Tone, but now Mike Piera has teamed with MXR to bring the next member of his fabled boutique overdrive family to a more affordable price point – and with mini dimensions. The DOT offers the versatility of its predecessors' three modes with Overdrive, Boost and Distortion.

£185
www.jimdunlop.com

CHAPMAN ML2 PRO £999

A revamped modern singlecut that might detach the man from the brand

Traditionally, the guitar-building legend story goes something like this: person makes guitars, people like the guitars, person makes more guitars, finds widespread acclaim. Chapman Guitars took a slightly different path, starting with Rob Chapman building a following of his own, then a natural evolution into including his following in the design process of the types of guitars they'd like to see (and ultimately, buy).

The brand has grown massively since those early days, though, and is now stocked in guitar shops around the world. One of its most recent models is the ML2 Pro, which takes the singlecut concept of the ML2 – discontinued a few years ago – and overhauls it for a fresh take on a contemporary singlecut.

The spec sheet shows that the core design of the guitar's body sticks to singlecut staples – that'll be a mahogany body, capped with maple and further dolled-up with a flamed maple veneer, then loaded with a pair of humbuckers. But that's about where the similarity to tradition ends, and it's clear that Chapman has gone big on giving us the trends and features of right now.

The neck is satin-finished, roasted maple, and it's set-through with 24 jumbo stainless steel frets (with rolled edges, of course). Plus, unlike the singlecut blueprint it's also got an almost naked ebony fingerboard set to a Fender-friendly 25.5" scale length.

Then there's the finish – it's called Azure Blue, and is a sort of turquoise-to-black burst, flattened off with a satin finish. The ML2 Pro is also available in River Styx Black, which has less of a burst to it, but still has a touch of faded texture.

Hardware-wise, there's a set of Hipshot Grip Lock locking tuners, and at the other end a Chapman-branded string-through-body, hardtail bridge breaks us even further from top-mounted tradition.

Finally the humbuckers are Seymour Duncan, but as you're probably expecting by now, it's not the JB/59 pairing we see so often. These are Sentient (neck) and Pegasus (bridge), which are designed with modern, lower tunings and tones in mind. According to Chapman, the Sentient serves-up dynamics thanks to its vintage-style 7.8k ohms output and a wide harmonic range, while the Pegasus is all about articulation and aggression – from crystalline cleans to biting distortion – from a higher 12.5k ohm output. They're wired to a three-way switch, and we get a pair of volume pots, plus a push/pull tone control for universally splitting the coils. That's a lot of stuff, but it's also not a budget guitar, clocking-in at just under a grand.

Taking it out of the box there are a couple of things we notice: first, there's no case. The justification being that the money is better invested into the guitar rather than peripherals, but we can't help but think that at least a gigbag would be reasonable at this price. Once you're over that gripe, you're likely to stop thinking about it fairly quickly because the ML2 Pro looks and feels fantastic.

A common dealbreaker for singlecuts is the weight. But here, the body has been slimmed-down with contouring and curves a-plenty, making it feel weirdly Strat-like in terms of comfort, but with a singlecut body.

1 NECK AND FINGERBOARD
There's roasted maple, stainless steel frets – 24 of 'em – and an ebony fingerboard. Plenty of 'now' features to get excited about.

2 TWO COLOUR OPTIONS
If that gorgeous Azure Blue satin finish doesn't take your fancy, check out the River Styx Black for an equally beautiful satin charcoal.

3 PICKUPS
P.A.F.s be gone! The ML2-Pro comes with Seymour Duncan Sentient and Pegasus pickups, and you can split them from the tone control, too.

4 HARDWARE
The Hipshot Grip-Lock tuners feel slick and space age, and Chapman's string-through-body fixed bridge keeps everything stable.

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Mahogany with maple top and flamed maple veneer

NECK: Roasted maple

FINGERBOARD: Ebony, 24 frets

SCALE: 25.5"

PICKUPS: Seymour Duncan Sentient (N) / Pegasus (B)

CONTROLS: Volume x2 Tone with push-pull coil-split

HARDWARE: Black, Chapman fixed bridge, Hipshot Grip-Lock 18:1 locking tuners

FINISH: Azure Blue [pictured], River Styx Black

CONTACT: Chapman Guitars, www.chapmanguitars.com

Photography Phil Barker

"Yeah, b*tch, magnets!"

A guide to the ML2 Pro's pickup choices

The Sentient and Pegasus in the ML2-Pro were originally designed for extended-range 7/8-string guitars, but after requests for standard versions, Seymour Duncan produced the six-string versions. They're designed around Alnico V magnets, and the Pegasus features a slight scoop to its midrange, as well as being designed to react equally well both clean and under drive. These attributes make it ideal in the neck position, particularly in the case of our guitar's coil split.

The finish is nothing short of brilliant, with the satin look complementing those curves even further, it's svelte and luxurious, without feeling like a, ahem... 'lawyer guitar'. This extends to the playing too. Roasted maple has become *very* popular over the last couple of years, but there are levels, and this feels premium. Our review guitar came with a low, slinky action and it didn't move at all throughout our time with it. While Chapman calls the profile a C-shape, it feels flatter to us – fast, but not wafer thin, and certainly not chunky. It's smooth throughout the run of the neck and those rolled, stainless steel frets add to the playability. There's no scratchy friction, the strings just skate across the frets with ease. The added benefit of that long-for-a-singlecut scale length puts lower tunings within reach too, however our guitar has clearly been well setup with standard tuning in mind, and that action would require tweaking to stop it buzzing for more permanent trips downtown.

This accommodation for more modern styles is reflected in the pickups, too, with the description proving accurate. The neck pickup has a certain rasp to it, free of mud and enhanced further when splitting the coils, giving us a gravelly, Fender-ish neck sound with a bit of bite. It's more convincing than many coil splits, and really adds another useable voice to the guitar.

Meanwhile there's noticeable compression and width coming from the bridge pickup. It's rich, and crying out for some gain, with that compressed attack remaining under some heavy distortion. It's not your classic, weepy blues sound, but if you want to go heavy then it's there for the taking. Hats off to the Hipshot choice, too, as the Grip Locks feature an 18:1 ratio and wind effortlessly. If you've ever tentatively winced as your machines creak and squeak as your string pulls into tension, you'll love these.

As an instrument, the ML2 Pro is very hard to pick holes in. It's full of premium features while wrapping them up in a classic design, but refined for now rather than looking too far to the past.

The only hesitations might be the fact that this guitar is the best part of a grand – and from a young brand. But, we shouldn't buy guitars based on their potential resale value, and in these times of penny-pinching frugality where we're used to paying more and getting less, Chapman might well have just helped to redefine what's expected from a £1000 guitar.

Stuart Williams

> "REDEFINES WHAT'S EXPECTED"

SUMMARY	
FEATURES	★★★★½
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★½
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★½
BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★
USABILITY	★★★★★
OVERALL RATING	★★★★½

ALSO TRY...

LTD ECLIPSE EC-1000 £999

The archetype modern singlecut marries a mahogany body with a mahogany neck, ebony fingerboard and EMG 60/81 pickups. With locking tuners and a Tonepros T-o-M-style bridge, no wonder it's a modern classic.

PRS SE MARK TREMONTI £969

The Alter Bridge man's signature SE has a 25-inch scale length, with 22 frets and a mahogany body with flame maple veneer, plus PRS Tremonti 'S' model pickups and a vibrato.

EPIPHONE JERRY CANTRELL LES PAUL CUSTOM PROPHECY £1049

JC's signature Prophecy has a two-octave neck, Ultra Modern weight-relieved mahogany body and Grover locking Rotomatics plus Fishman Fluences.

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SQUIER 40TH ANNIVERSARY JAZZMASTER GOLD EDITION £499

The price of gold...

We could start with some spiel about how much guitar players get for their money with a Squier compared to 40 years ago, but the brand started out very strong with Japanese-made instruments, and this is one with an RRP of £499, so is not exactly entry-level. Instead we should focus on the more interesting Squier narrative that's been unfolding in more recent history: the brand is becoming increasingly distinct in its own right. In addition to affordable takes on Fender cornerstones, there's plenty of alluring models exclusive to Squier. And if they can hold their own with the Mexican Fenders, that's cause for real celebration. We're here to find out.

The 40th Anniversary models have come in two waves; the gold hardware/block inlay 'Gold Edition' example we have here and the aged hardware/satin finished Vintage Edition guitars that are more understated. Both sets feature anodized aluminium pickguards. For us, this Jazzmaster from the former camp is the most visually appealing of the bunch; surely even gold hardware cynics can't deny this Olympic White offset wears it well. The context of a guitar's finish matters and it's interesting to see how gold anodised scratchplate and hardware gives the white more of a creamy look here in combination. It looks regal and very Fender without overstating. The build here is of a standard to match it.

We have to be honest, pau ferro fretboards can be hit and miss for us in terms of aesthetic. The issue has been sidestepped here with the use of the consistently darker Indian laurel – though it's the same material used for Squier's entry-level Affinity series. The downside is it looks quite dry, and ours would benefit from some conditioning.

The Fender-designed soapbar pickups hold their own with our Fender guitars in terms of output. The spiky, sometimes brash bridge and warm but defined neck position have a girth in character, especially on the bridge, compared to the traditional Tele, Strat and Jag. And it can divide opinion, but we're fans of the rhythm circuit 'preset' switch on the upper horn that can mellow things out quickly by isolating the neck pickup with a different capacitor and thumbwheel tone and volume controls.

Of course our big question is how well does the tuning hold up with the vibrato unit in action? And that's where our glee fades a little. It doesn't take much use to throw it out by quite a margin. Such issues aren't unusual for offset fans, and tech attention, a shim or even a third party bridge upgrade can usually offer a remedy. But for a player who doesn't know this, or isn't willing and able to deal with it, it could put them off their £500 purchase. So caveat emptor, but this is still the closest Squier to a true Fender Jazzmaster in the current catalogue – idiosyncrasies included.

Rob Laing

SUMMARY	
FEATURES	★★★★½
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★½
BUILD QUALITY	★★★★
PLAYABILITY	★★★½
OVERALL RATING	★★★★

1 BLOCK INLAYS
An offset with pearloid block inlays is like strawberries and cream, but surprisingly the only other Jazzmaster models in the current Fender catalogue offered with them are the Jim Root and Troy Van Leeuwen signature models.

2 NECK PROFILE
Narrow tall frets and a gloss back finish remain true to vintage. It's quite a chunkier, deep 'C' profile that nods to vintage, too, and you're getting the optimum of a well-carved bone nut for your money here.

3 POTS
It's not unusual for fairly abrupt tapering of treble response as you wind down a Squier's volume pot, that's evident here, too. It's worth upgrading if you have soldering chops, or money to pay someone to do it.

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Poplar
NECK: Maple
SCALE: 25.5"
FINGERBOARD: Indian laurel
FRETS: 21, Narrow Tall
PICKUPS: Fender Designed Alnico Single-Coil
CONTROLS: 'Lead circuit' controls (slide switch down): master volume, master tone; 'Rhythm circuit' Controls (slide switch up): 2x thumbwheel controls for neck pickup volume and tone
HARDWARE: Gold-plated six-saddle Vintage-style bridge with non-locking floating vibrato, Gold-plated vintage-style tuners
WEIGHT: 7.8lb
GIGBAG: No
LEFT-HANDED: No
FINISH: Olympic White [as reviewed], Lake Placid Blue
CONTACT: Fender, www.fender.com

Photography Phil Barker

MASTER
POWER
1W
20W
100W
TREBLE
MIDDLE
BASS
RESPONSE
KT88
6L6
EL34
6V6
EL84
LINEAR
PRESET
VOICE
USA
UK
FLAT
GAIN
REVERB
REVERB
AMPED 1
DEPT. 10 | 100W AMP PEDAL

BLACKSTAR DEPT 10 AMPED 1 £439

Blackstar gets serious about scaling down

Who says an amp can't be on your pedalboard? It's now a totally viable option, cab permitting, and what's especially interesting is watching amp companies acknowledge this demand for flexibility alongside their more traditional amp lines. With Amped 1 Blackstar are joining fellow Brits Victory in that widening of appeal, but unlike that company's V4 Duchess, Copper and Kraken, this 100-watt pedal unit does not feature valves. It does, however, cover *a lot* of needs for an amp.

The first three pedals in the Dept 10 series last year were valve-loaded preamps, with two also debuting the company's DSP speaker simulation technology Cab Rig. That features here too, but the additions elsewhere are striking; three preamp modes, six power amp response settings – like Blackstar's Silverline range – and onboard reverb. The effects loop the Dept 10 Dual Drive and Dual Distortion is here too, but the comprehensive power amp stage and power response modes (1-watt, 20-watt and 100-watt) suggest much more of a versatile pedal platform than before. We already know how much the Silverline amps could feel like a valve experience, so we're hoping that's the case here, too.

There's UK, US and Flat preamp modes here with the latter aimed at those who want to use Amped 1 alongside a modelling processor like Helix or Kemper, with their own preamp models. The US mode is based on mid-60s Fender amps and delivers high clean headroom for your overdrive pedals. The UK brings much more gain range, up to the medium drive Blackstar are so adept at. Ideal as a preset to kick in as required (and setting the onboard preset is a breeze). Selecting from the power amp valve responses allows us to audition and tailor our Amped 1 settings around our particular drive pedals.

And... it does feel and respond like Blackstar's Silverline amps. Crucially as a foundation for your tones it offers the clean headroom the Dual preamps were lacking and that enhances the full amp experience. The simple three-band EQ and clean layout make the transition from traditional amp to pedal layout feel smooth for us. And the Cab Rig/headphone amp makes for an easy transition to studio desk. It's comprehensive and well-considered – there's MIDI input too, though no stereo out – but most of all Amped 1 can go fiercely loud and be tamed down efficiently to bedroom levels.

The appeal for players using comprehensive modelling processors is debatable for us – it seems like an over-engineered solution to run into a traditional cab compared to a straightforward power amp – but our gripe for traditional pedal users is the fact you can only change reverb type between spring and plate via Blackstar's Architect software. Nevertheless, that's a relatively forgivable absence on a pedal with a big amp's performance and feature set.

Rob Laing

SUMMARY	
FEATURES	★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★
BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★
USABILITY	★★★★★
OVERALL RATING	★★★★★

Photography Phil Barker

1 POWER OUTPUTS

Blackstar are clearly committed to winning players around to the pedal amp format; this has two power 9V outlets with the capability of powering up to 500mA of pedal power draw – so you could actually add one of the previous Dept 10 pedals, or any others you wish.

2 SPEAKER OUTPUTS

Just in case you didn't realise Blackstar had thought of nearly everything, there's a choice of 8 or 16 ohm speaker outputs.

AT A GLANCE

ORIGIN: Designed in the UK, made in China

TYPE: Solid state 100-watt pedal amp

FEATURES: Preamp section with UK, US and Flat voices, Class D power stage choice of six responses (KT88, 6L6, EL34, 6V6, EL84 and a Linear mode for maximum transparency), Reverb with Freeze function when held down for longer reverberation, Cab Rig with three onboard presets, three power modes (1-watt, 20-watt and 100-watt)

CONTROLS: Preset and Reverb footswitches, Gain, Bass, Mid, Treble, Master Volume, Reverb level, power amp Response rotary selector, preamp Voice mini toggle, Cab Rig output line level control.

CONNECTIONS: MIDI in, Line in, line out / Loop, USB C, 8 and 16 ohm speaker outs, 2x 9V outputs (500mA total), XLR DI out, Cab Rig / headphone Line Out

POWER: 100V-240V mains

DIMENSIONS: 200 x 81 x 149 (mm)

CONTACT: Blackstar, blackstaramps.com

£129

ELECTRO-HARMONIX J MASCIS RAM'S HEAD BIG MUFF

EHX's Ram's Head gets a signature facelift

Fuzz is often the Marmite of the gain world; to those who love it, it's a mammoth sonic tool that can beef up your sound and enhance any riff. To those who hate it, it's written off as muddy and devoid of articulation. One person who is a fan though is Dinosaur Jr's J Mascis. Having had an EHX Big Muff on his 'board throughout his career, his love for Big Muffs was displayed through his collection in the documentary *Fuzz: The Sound That Revolutionized The World*. J uses the Big Muff, specifically the 'Ram's Head' version of the pedal from the 70s as the basis for all of his drive sounds, sometimes solo, but often stacking them with other gain providers.

Now, this is of course a signature version of the Ram's Head Big Muff, a standard reissue of which you can also buy with a list price of $15 less than J's pedal. However, the gap widens once you start looking at street prices, and according to EHX, both are based on a 1973 V2 Violet Ram's Head, and both boast enhanced articulation over other Muff examples. But geekery aside, what does it sound like?

Well, there's definitely more note separation and attack than on our standard Big Muff Pi reissue – with the Sustain (that's gain) and Volume (output) cranked as-per J's settings, it's then down to the tone control to govern how much bite you get. And there's a surprising amount. J's playing uses a lot of open chords, and we found that backing the gain off a bit helped with the clarity, while pushing it up and backing the tone off gives us a thick, Gilmour-ish lead sound. It's great in front of our overdriven valves too, but unless you have a noise gate we'd suggest backing things off somewhat if you're stacking.

Ultimately, Dino Jr fans are going to love this. For everyone else it's a fuzz pedal that is more usable than some of the more wooly examples. If it is re-voiced from EHX's standard Ram's Head, then it's subtle. So, one for the collectors.

Stuart Williams

> "DINOSAUR JR FANS ARE GOING TO LOVE THIS"

SUMMARY

FEATURES	★★★★½
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★½
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★½
BUILD QUALITY	★★★★½
USABILITY	★★★★½
OVERALL RATING	★★★★½

AT A GLANCE

TYPE: Fuzz

CONTROLS: Volume, Sustain, Tone

SOCKETS: Input, output, power

BYPASS: Buffered

POWER: 9v PSU (not included), battery

CONTACT: Electro-Harmonix, www.ehx.com

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CANDY DARLINGS
Guitarists Michael Quick and Steve Di Genco either side of vocalist Zak Quiram

Words Sam Roche

CANDY

Positioning themselves as the heavier, more chaotic sibling of Pittsburgh metallers Code Orange – which is, indeed, a feat in and of itself – Richmond, Virginia upstarts Candy have made ripples in the underground hardcore and metal scenes since their debut three-track demo in 2017. If their first full length, 2018's *Good To Feel*, got their metaphorical foot in the genre's door, its follow-up, this year's *Heaven Is Here*, kicks that door squarely off its hinges. Alongside sporadic digitally influenced effects and soundbites sit guitarists Michael Quick and Steve Di Genco, whose urgent and frenetic alternate picking runs and doomy powerchord riffs keep the Candy freight train barrelling along in a genre of their own crafting.

Make no mistake, despite an endearing name, there's nothing sweet about this five-piece. On *Heaven Is Here*, gritty riffs are made grittier by dangerous levels of distortion and frontman Zak Quiram's guttural vocals, while frequent tempo changes ensure any sense of comfort or familiarity is quickly dispelled. The record's highlights include opener *Human Condition Above Human Opinion*, which finds Quick and Di Genco offering devilish drop-tuned chugs and lightning-fast alternate picking runs over blast beats, its title track, which keeps you on your toes with unpredictable tempo shifts and a gloriously simple but heavy-hitting riff, and *Perverse*, the 10-minute closing epic which blurs the boundary between music and sound design.

And while *Heaven Is Here* is sonically intense, to say the least, Candy's live shows match that intensity and then some, without ever compromising on the tightness that's required in such a style of music. Snippets of the band's live performances can be found online, the best quality in terms of recording on Vans' YouTube channel. The eight-minute clip sees the quintet tear through *Lust For Destruction* and *Human Target*, two tracks from *Good To Feel*, and the outro title track from their 2017 EP, *Candy Says*.

Another clip can be found in which the band play an ultra-claustrophobic show at Programme Skate & Sound, a skateboard shop in Fullerton, California. Recorded before the release of *Good To Feel*, it offers a glimpse into the group's unwavering ferocity, which remains unchanged and unbridled four years later in 2022.

If Code Orange launched themselves into the mainstream with tech-influenced metalcore, we're confident in assuming Candy will follow right in their footsteps.

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'These pickups have all the clarity but all the aggression as well. The high strings poke their chest out just as much as the low strings. Every sound I need in one pickup.'

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bareknucklepickups.co.uk

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